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FEBRUARY, 1948

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The Cicerone (a story)

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Léon Bloy and the Religious Novel

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SAUL BELLOW is the author of "Dangling Man" and "The Victim."

JOHN BERRYMAN'S first book of poems will be published in May by William Sloane Associates.

NICOLA CHIAROMONTE is at work on a critical portrait of Malraux for **Partisan Review.**

RAYNER HEPPENSTALL writes for the **New Statesman and Nation.** The piece in this number is the first chapter in his book, "The Double Image," which Secker and Warburg have brought out in London.

SIDNEY HOOK recently edited, with Milton R. Konvitz, "Freedom and Experience," a collection of essays by various contemporary American philosophers.

MARY McCARTHY, who wrote "The Company She Keeps," teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY'S film on Henry Moore, the sculptor, is being released by Falcon Films.

ROBERT WARSHOW is the Managing Editor of **Commentary.**

The drawing by Gerald Manley Hopkins was printed in his "Further Letters," published by Oxford University Press, and the Miró reproductions were made from photographs in the Archives Gomis-Prats in Barcelona.

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St. Simeon Stylites, as drawn by Gerald Manley Hopkins.

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Mary McCarthy

THE CICERONE

When they first met him, in the *wagons-lits,* he was not so nervous. Tall, straw-colored, standing smoking in the corridor, he looked like an English cigarette. Indeed, there was something about him so altogether parched and faded that he seemed to bear the same relation to a man that a Gold Flake bears to a normal cigarette. English, surely, said the young American lady. The young American man was not convinced. If English, then a bounder, he said, adjusting his glasses to peer at the stranger with such impassioned curiosity that his eyes in their light-brown frames seemed to rush dangerously forward, like strange green headlights on an old-fashioned car. As yet, he felt no unusual interest in the stranger who had just emerged from a compartment; this curiosity was his ordinary state of being.

It was so hard, the young lady complained, to tell a bounder in a foreign country; one was never sure; those dreadful striped suits that English gentlemen wear . . . and the Duke of Windsor talking in a cockney accent. Here on the Continent, continued the young man, it was even more confusing, with the upper classes trying to dress like English gentlemen and striking the inevitable false notes; the dukes all looked like floorwalkers, but every man who looked like a floorwalker was unfortunately not a duke. Their conversation continued in an agreeable rattle-rattle. Its inspiration, the Bounder, was already half-dismissed. It was not quite clear to either of them whether they were trying to get into European society or whether this was simply a joke that they had between them. The young man had lunched with a viscountess in Paris and had admired her house and her houseboat, which was docked in the Seine. They had poked their heads into a great many courtyards in the Faubourg St. Germain, including the very grandiose one, bristling with guards who instantly

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ejected them, that belonged to the Soviet Embassy. On the whole, architecture, they felt, provided the most solid answer to their social curiosity: the bedroom of Marie Antoinette at the Petit Trianon had informed them that the French royal family were dwarfs, a secret already hinted at in Mme Pompadour's bedroom at the Frick museum in New York; in Milan, they would meet the Sforzas through the agency of their Castello; at Stra, on the Brenta, they would get to know the Pisani. They had read Proust, and the decline of the great names in modern times was accepted by them as a fact; the political speeches of the living Count Sforza suggested the table-talk of Mme Verdurin, gracing with her bourgeois platitudes the board of an ancient house. Nevertheless, the sight of a rococo ceiling, a great swaying crystal chandelier, glimpsed at night through an open second-story window, would come to them like an invitation which is known to exist but which has been incomprehensibly lost in the mails; a vague sadness descended, yet they did not feel like outsiders.

Victors in a world war of unparalleled ferocity, heirs of imperialism and the philosophy of the enlightenment, they walked proudly on the dilapidated streets of Europe. They had not approved of the war and were pacifist and bohemian in their sympathies, but the exchange had made them feel rich, and they could not help showing it. The exchange had turned them into a prince and a princess, and, considering the small bills, the weekly financial anxieties that attended them at home, this was quite an accomplishment. There was no door, therefore, that, they believed, would not open to them should they present themselves fresh and crisp as two one-dollar bills. These beliefs, these dreams, were, so far, no more to them than a story children tell each other. The young man, in fact, had found his small role as war-profiteer so distasteful and also so frightening that he had refused for a whole week to go to his money-changer and had cashed his checks at the regular rate at the bank. For the most part, their practical, moral life was lived, guidebook in hand, on the narrow streets and in the cafés of the Left Bank—they got few messages at their hotel.

Yet occasionally when they went in their best clothes to a fashionable bar, she wearing the flowers he had bought her (ten cents in American money), they hoped in silent unison during the first

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cocktail for the Dr.-Livingstone-I-presume that would discover them in this dark continent. And now on the train that was carrying them into Italy, the European illusion quickened once more within them. They eyed every stranger with that suspension of disbelief which, to invert Wordsworth, makes its object poetical. The man at the next table had talked all through lunch to two low types with his mouth full, but the young man remained steady in his conviction that the chewer was a certain English baronet traveling to his villa in Florence, and he had nearly persuaded the young lady to go up and ask him his name. He particularly valued the young lady today because, coming from the West, she entered readily into conversation with people she did not know. It was a handicap, of course, that there were two of them ("My dear," said the young lady, "a couple looks so complete"), but they were not inclined to separate—the best jockey in a horse race scorns to take a lighter weight. Unfortunately, their car, except for the Bounder at the other end, offered very little scope to his imaginative talent or her loquacity.

But, as they were saying, Continental standards were mysteriously different; at the frontier at Domodossola a crowd gathered on the rainy platform in front of their car. Clearly there was some object of attraction here, and, dismissing the idea that it was herself, the young lady moved to the window. Next to her, a short, heavy, ugly man with steel-rimmed spectacles was passing some money to a person on the platform, who immediately hurried away. Other men came up and spoke in undertones through the window to the man beside her. In all of this there was something that struck the young lady as strange—so much quiet and so much motion, which seemed the more purposeful, the more businesslike without its natural accompaniment of sound. Her clear, school-teacher-on-holiday voice intruded resolutely on this quarantine. *"Qu'est-ce que se passe?"* she demanded. *"Rien,"* said her neighbor abruptly, glancing at her and away with a single, swiveling movement of the spectacled eyes. *"C'est des amis qui recontrent des amis."* Rebuffed, she turned back to the young man. "Black market," she said. "They are changing money." He nodded, but seeing her thoughts travel capably to the dollar bills pinned to her underslip, he touched her with a cautioning hand. The dead, noncommittal face beside her, the briefcase, the

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noiseless, nondescript young men on the platform, the single laugh that had rung out in the Bounder's end of the car when the young lady had put her question, all bade him beware: this black market was not for tourists. The man who had hurried away came back with a dirty roll of bills which he thrust through window. *"Ite, missa est,"* remarked the young lady sardonically, but the man beside her gave no sign of having heard; he continued to gaze immovably at the thin young men before him, as though the transaction had not yet been digested.

At this moment, suddenly, a hubbub of singing, of agitated voices shouting slogans was heard. A kind of frenzy of noise, which had an unruly, an unmistakably seditious character, moved toward the train from somewhere outside the shed. The train gave a loud puff. "A revolution!" thought the young lady, clasping the young man's hand with a pang of terror and excitement; he, like everyone else in the car, had jumped to his feet. A strange procession came into sight, bright and bedraggled in the rain—an old woman in a white dress and flowered hat waving a large red flag, two or three followers with a homemade-looking bouquet, and finally a grey-bearded old man dressed in an ancient frock coat, carrying an open old-fashioned black umbrella and leaping nimbly into the air. Each of the old man's hops was fully two yards high; his thin legs in the black trousers were jacknifed neatly under him; the umbrella maintained a perfect perpendicular; only his beard flew forward and his coat-tails back; at the summit of each hop, he shouted joyously, *"Togliatti!"* The demonstration was coming toward the car, where alarm had given way to amazement; Steel Glasses alone was undisturbed by the appearance of these relics of political idealism; his eyes rested on them without expression. Just as they gained the protection of the shed, the train, unfortunately, began to move. The followers, lacking the old man's gymnastic precision, were haphazard with the bouquet; it missed the window, which had been opened for the lira-changing, and fell back into the silent crowd. The train picked up speed.

In the compartment, the young man was rolling on the seat with laughter; he was always the victim of his emotions, which—even the pleasurable ones—seemed to overrun him like the troops of some marauding army. Thus happiness, with him, had a look of intensest

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suffering, and the young lady clucked sympathetically as he gasped out, *"The Possessed, The Possessed."* To the newcomer in the compartment, however, the young man's condition appeared strange. "What is the matter with him?" the young man, deep in the depths of his joy, heard an odd, accented little voice asking; then the young lady's voice was explaining, "Dostoevsky . . . a small political center . . . a provincial Russian town." "But no," said the other voice, "it is Togliatti, the leader of *Italian* Communists who is in the next compartment. He is coming from the Peace Conference where he talks to Molotov." The words, *Communist, Molotov, Peace Conference,* bored the young man so much that he came to his senses instantly, sat up, wiped his glasses, and perceived that it was the Bounder who was in the compartment, and to whom the young lady was now re-explaining that her friend was laughing because the scene on the platform had reminded him of something in a book. "But no," protested the Bounder, who was still convinced that the young lady had not understood *him*. He appeared to come to some sort of decision and ran out into the corridor, returning with a Milanese newspaper folded to show an item in which the words, *Togliatti, Parigi, Pace,* and *Molotov* all indubitably figured. The young lady, weary of explanation, allowed a bright smile as of final comprehension to pass over her features and handed the paper to the young man, who could not read Italian either; in such acts of submission their conversations with Europeans always ended. They had got used to it, but they sometimes felt that they had stepped at Le Havre into some vast cathedral where a series of intrusive custodians stood between them and the frescoes relating with tireless patience the story of the Nativity. Europeans, indeed, seemed to them often a race of custodians, didactic automatons who answered, like fortune-telling machines, questions to which one already knew the answer or questions which no one would conceivably ask.

True to this character, the Bounder, now, had plainly taken a shine to the young lady, who was permitting him to tell her facts about the Italian political situation which she had previously read in a newspaper. That her position on Togliatti was identical with his own, he assumed as axiomatic, and her dissident murmurs of correction he treated as a kind of linguistic static. Her seat on the *wagons-*

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lits spoke louder to him than words; she could never persuade him that she hated Togliatti from the *left,* any more than she could convince a guide in Paris of her indifference to Puvis de Chavannes. Her attention he took for assent, and only the young man troubled him, as he had troubled many guides in many palaces and museums by lingering behind in some room he fancied; an occasional half-smothered burst of laughter indicated to the two talkers that he was still in the Dostoevsky attic. But the glances of tender understanding that the young lady kept rather pointedly turning toward her friend were an explanation in pantomime; his alarms stilled, the visitor neatly drew up his trousers and sat down.

They judged him to be a man about forty-two years old. In America he might have passed for younger; he had kept his hair, light-brown and slightly oiled, with a ripple at the brow and a half-ripple at the back; his figure, moreover, was slim—it had not taken on that architectural form, those transepts, bows, and barrel-vaulting, that with Americans demonstrate (how quickly often!) that the man is no longer a boy but an Institution. Like the young lady's hairdresser, like the gay little grocer on Third Avenue, he had retained in middle age something for which there is no English word, something *très mignon,* something *gentil,* something *joli garçon.* It lay in a quickness and lightness of movement, in slim ankles, small feet, thin, agile wrists, in a certain demure swoop of lowering eyelids, in the play of lashes, and the butterfly flutter of the airy white handkerchief protruding from the breast pocket. It lay also in a politeness so eager as to seem freshly learned and in a childlike vanity, a covert sense of performance, in which one could trace the swing of the censer and the half-military, half-theatrical swish of the altar-boy's skirts.

But if this sprightliness of demeanor and of dress gave the visitor an appearance of youthfulness, it also gave him, by its very exaggeration, a morbid appearance of age. Those quick, small smiles, those turns of the eye, and expressive raisings of the eyebrow had left a thousand tiny wrinkles on his dust-colored face; his slimness too had something cadaverous in it—chicken-breasted he appeared in his tan silk gabardine suit. And, oddly enough, this look of premature senility was not masculine but feminine. Though no more barbered and perfumed than the next Italian man, he evoked the black mass of the

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dressing-table and the hand-mirror; he reminded them of that horror so often met in Paris, city of beauty, the well-preserved woman in her fifties. At the same time, he was unquestionably a man; he was already talking of conquests. It was simply, perhaps, that the preservation of youth had been his main occupation; age was the specter he had dealt with too closely; like those middle-aged women he had become its intimate through long animosity.

Yet just as they had decided that he was a man somehow without a profession (they had come to think in unison and needed the spoken word only for a check), he steered himself out of a small whirlpool of ruffled political feelings and announced that he was in the silk business. He was returning from London, and had spent a week in Paris, where he had been short of francs and had suffered a serious embarrassment when taking a lady out to lunch. The lady, it appeared, was the wife of the Egyptian delegate to the Peace Conference, whom he had met—also—on the *wagons-lits*. There was a great deal more of this, all either very simple or very complicated, they were unable to say which, for they could not make out whether he was telling the same story twice, or, whether, as in a folk tale, the second story repeated the pattern of the first but had a variant ending. His English was very odd; it had a speed and a precision of enunciation that combined with a vagueness of grammar so as to make the two Americans feel that they were listening to a foreign language, a few words of which they could recognize. In the same way, his anecdotes had a wealth and circumstantiality of detail and an overall absence of form, or at least so the young lady, who was the only one who was listening, reported later to the young man. The young man, who was tone-deaf, found the visitor's conversation reminiscent of many concerts he had been taken to, where he could only distinguish the opening bars of any given work; for him, Mr. Sciarappa's stories were all in their beginnings, and he would interrupt quite often with a reply square in the middle, just as, quite often, he used to break in with wild applause when the pianist paused between the first and second movements of a sonata.

But at the mention of the silk business, the young man's eyes had once more burned a terrifying green. With his afflamed imagination, he was at the same time extremely practical. Hostile to Marxist

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theory, he was marxist in personal matters, having no interest in people's opinions, or even, perhaps, in their emotions (the superstructure), but passionately, madly curious as to what people did and how they made their money (the base). He did not intend that Mr. Sciarappa (he had presented his card) should linger forever in Paris adding up the lunch bill of the Egyptian delegate's wife. Having lain *couchant* for the ten minutes that human politeness required, he sprang into the conversation with a question: did the *signor* have an interest in the silk mills at Como? And now the visitor betrayed the first signs of nervousness. The question had suggested knowledge that was at least second-hand. The answer remained obscure. Mr. Sciarappa did not precisely own a factory, nor was he precisely in the exporting business. The two friends, who were not lacking in common humanity, precipitately turned the subject to the beauty of Italian silks, the superiority of Italian tailoring to French or even English tailoring, the chic of Italian men. The moment passed, and a little later, under the pretense of needing her help as a translator, Mr. Sciarappa showed the young lady a cablegram dated London which seemed to be a provisional order for a certain quantity of something, but the garbled character of the English suggested that the cable had been composed—in London—by Mr. Sciarappa himself. Nevertheless, the Americans accepted the cablegram as a proof of their visitor's *bona fides,* though actually it proved no more than that he was in business, that is, that he existed in the Italy of the post-war world.

The troubled moment, in fact, had its importance for them only in retrospect. A seismographic recording of conditions in the compartment would have shown only the faintest tremor. The desire to believe the best of people is a prerequisite for intercourse with strangers; suspicion is reserved for friends. The young lady in particular, being gregarious, took the kindest view of everyone; she was under the impression that she was the only person in the world who told lies. The young man today fell in with her gullibility, with her "normal" interpretations of life, because he saw that they were heading for friendship with Mr. Sciarappa and felt as yet no positive objections to the idea. They were alone in Italy; a guide would be useful. Moreover, Mr. Sciarappa had announced that he was going

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on to Rome, where he lived with his parents, at midnight. Already he had invited them to join him for a drink in Milan in the famous Galleria; the worst they could expect was a dinner *à trois*. Therefore, he acted, temporarily, on the young lady's persuasion that their visitor was an ordinary member of the upper middle classes in vaguely comfortable circumstances, in other words, that he was an abstraction; in the same way, certain other abstract beliefs of hers concerning true love and happiness had conveyed him, somewhat more critical and cautious, into this compartment with her on a romantic journey into Italy.

But, just as it had come as a surprise to him that love should go on from step to step, that it should move from city to country and cross an ocean and part of a continent, so in Milan it was with a vague astonishment that he beheld Mr. Sciarappa remove his baggage from the taxi in front of their hotel and hurry inside ahead of him to inquire for a room. For the next three days, the trio could be seen any evening promenading, arm in arm, down the long arcade of the Galleria, past the crowded little tables with the pink, and the peach, and the lime, and the orange colored tablecloths, walking with the air of distinguished inseparables, the two tall men and the tallish young lady with a large black hat. Or at noon they could be found there, perspiring and not so distinguished, sipping Americanos, Mr. Sciarappa's favorite drink, at the café with the orange tablecloths, which Mr. Sciarappa considered the cheapest. At night, they appeared at Giannino's or Crispi's (not so expensive as Biffi's but better food, said Mr. Sciarappa), restaurants where Mr. Sciarappa made himself at home, sending back the wine which the Americans had ordered and getting in its place some thinner and sourer vintage of which he had special knowledge. The one solid trait the two friends could discover in Mr. Sciarappa's character was a rooted abhorrence of the advertised first-rate, of best hotels, top restaurants, principal shopping streets, famous vineyards; and, since for the first time in many years they saw themselves in a position to command these advantages, they found this trait of Mr. Sciarappa's rather a cross. In American money, the difference between the best and the mediocre was trifling; indeed even in Italian money, it was often nonexistent. They tried to convince Mr. Sciarappa of this, but their computations he took as an

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insult to himself and his defeated country. His lip would curl into a small, angry sneer that looked as if it had come out of a permanent-wave machine. "Ah, you Americans," he would say, "your streets are paved with dollars."

The two friends, after the first night, spent on bad beds in an airless room hung with soiled lace curtains, moved with a certain thump into the best hotel next door. They would not have stayed in any case, for the young man had a horror of the sordid, and the best hotel proved, when you counted breakfast, to be cheaper than its second-rate neighbor. Nevertheless, in the circumstances, the move had a significant tone—they hoped to fray, if not to sever, their connection with Mr. Sciarappa, and perhaps also, to tell the truth, to insult him a little. The best hotel, half-requisitioned by the Allied armies, smiled on them with brass and silver insignia, freshly washed summer khaki and blond, straight, water-combed American hair; when Mr. Sciarappa came for cocktails in the same gabardine suit, he looked somehow like a man in prison clothes or the inmate of a mental institution. The young lady, who was the specialist in sentiments, felt toward him sorrow, shame, triumph.

They could not make out what he wanted of them.

Whatever business had, on the train, been hurrying him on to Rome had presumably lost its urgency. He never mentioned it again; indeed, the three spoke very little together, and it was this that gave them that linked and wedded look. During the day he disappeared, except for the luncheon apéritif. He went to Como, to Genoa, and, once, in the Galleria, they saw him with an unshaven, white-haired, morose-looking man whom he introduced as his brother-in-law. In restaurants, he was forever jumping up from the table with a gay little wave of the hand to greet a party that was in the act of vanishing into the dark outdoors. Though he was a man who twitched with sociability, whose conversation was a veritable memo pad of given names, connections, ties, appointments, he seemed to be unknown to the very waiters whom he directed in the insolent style of an old customer. The brother-in-law, who plainly disliked him, and they themselves, whom he hated, were his only friends.

The most remarkable symptom of this hatred, which ate into the conversation leaving acid holes of boredom, which kept him glancing

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at other tables as though in hope of succor or release, was a tone of unshakable, impolite disbelief. "Ah, I am not such a fool," his pretty face would almost angrily indicate if they told him that they had spent their morning in the castle-fort of the Sforzas, where beneath the ramparts bombed by the liberators, a troupe of Italian players with spotlights lent by the American army was preparing to do an American pacifist play. Every statement volunteered by the two friends broke on the edge of Mr. Sciarappa's contempt like the very thinnest alibi; parks and the public buildings they described to him became as transparent as falsehoods—anyone of any experience knew there were no such places in Milan. When they praised the wicked-looking Filippo Lippi Madonna they had seen in the Sforza Gallery, Mr. Sciarappa and his disaffected brother-in-law, who was supposed to speak no English, exchanged, for the first time, a fraternal, sidewise look: a masterpiece, indeed, their incredulous eyebrows ejaculated—they had heard that story before.

That Mr. Sciarappa should question their professions of enthusiasm was perhaps natural. His own acquaintance with Italy's artistic treasures seemed distant; they had had the reputation with him of being much admired by English and American tourists; the English and American air-forces, however, had quoted them, as he saw, at a somewhat lower rate. Moreover, it was as if the devaluation of the currency had, for Mr. Sciarappa's consistent thought, implicated everything Italian; cathedrals, pictures, women had dropped with the lira. He could not imagine that anyone could take these things at their Baedeker valuation, any more than he could imagine that anyone in his right mind would change dollars into lira at the official rate. The two friends soon learned that to praise any Italian product, were it only a bicycle or a child in the street, was an insult to Mr. Sciarappa's intelligence. They would be silent—and eventually were—but the most egregious insult, the story that they had come to Italy as tourists, they could not wipe away.

He felt himself to be the victim of an imposture, that was plain. But did he believe that they were rich pretending to be poor, or poor pretending to be rich? They could not tell. On the whole, it seemed as if Mr. Sciarappa's suspicions, like everything else about him, had a certain flickering quality; the light in him went on and off, as he

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touched one theory or another, cruising in his shaft like an elevator. And, as the young man said, you could not blame Mr. Sciarappa for wondering: was it in the character of a rich man or a poor that they stayed in the best hotel, which was slightly less expensive than an auto-camp?

The obscurity of their financial position justified Mr. Sciarappa's anger. Nevertheless, though sympathetic, they grew tired of spending their evenings with a stranger who was continually out of sorts because he could not make up his mind whether they were worth swindling. "We did not come to Italy to see Mr. Sciarappa," they would say to each other every night as they rode up in the elevator, and would promise themselves to evade this time, without fail, the meeting he had fixed for the next day. Yet as noon came on the following morning, they would find that they were approaching the Galleria. He is waiting, they would say to each other, and without discussion they would hurry on toward the café with the orange tablecloths, where they were late but never quite late enough to miss Mr. Sciarappa.

He was never glad to see them. He rose to acknowledge them with a kind of bravura laziness of his tall, "English" figure, one shoulder lifted in a shrug of ennui or resignation. He kissed the young lady's hand and said to the young man perfunctorily, and sometimes with a positive yawn, "Hello, sit down, my dear." One of his odd little tricks was to pretend that they were not together. The young man's frequent absences of mind he treated literally, when it suited him, as if they were absences of body, and once he carried this so far as to run his fingers up and down the young lady's bare arm as the three of them rode in a taxi, inquiring as he did so, in the most civil tone imaginable, whether she found her friend satisfactory. His conversation was directed principally to the young lady, but for all that he had no real interest in her. It was the young man whom he watched, often in the mirror of her face which never left her friend as he talked wildly, excitedly, extravagantly, with long wrists flung outward in intensity of gesture: did Mr. Sciarappa see beauty and strangeness in him or the eccentricity of money? Or was he merely trying to determine which it was that she saw?

It was irresistible that they should try to coax Mr. Sciarappa (or Scampi, as they had begun to call him, after fried crayfish-tails,

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his favorite dish) out into the open. The name of a certain lady, middlingly but authentically rich, who was expecting to see them in Venice, began to figure allusively, alluringly, in their conversation. These pointers that they directed toward Polly Herkimer Grabbe had at first a merely educational purpose. National pride forbade that they should allow Scampi to take them for rich Americans when a really good example of the genre existed only a day's journey away. But their first references to the flower-bulb heiress, to her many husbands, her collection of garden statuary, her career as an impresario of modern architecture, failed, seemingly, to impress Scampi; he raised his eyes briefly from the plate of Saltimbocca (Jump-in-your-mouth) that he was eating, and then returned to his meal. The language difficulties made it sometimes impossible to tell whether Mr. Sciarappa really heard what they said. They had remarked once, for example, in conversational desperation, that they had come to Italy to retrace the footsteps of Lord Byron: they were on their way from Lausanne, where he had composed "The Prisoner of Chillon" in a bedroom of the Hotel Angleterre, to Venice to visit his house on the Grand Canal. "Ah well, my dear," said Mr. Sciarappa, "if he is an English lord, you do not have to worry; his house will not be requisitioned, and you will have the use of his gondolier." There had been no way the young man could find of preventing the young lady from supplying the poet's dates, and now, it seemed, Scampi was under the impression that everyone they knew in Venice was dead. It required the largest brush-strokes to bring Miss Grabbe to life for him. By the third night, when the young man had finished a wholly invented account of Miss Grabbe's going through the customs with a collection of obscene fountain statuary, Mr. Sciarappa showed interest and inquired how old Miss Grabbe was. The next evening, at cocktails, he had an auto-pullman ticket to Venice.

He was leaving the next morning at seven. The two Americans, remembering that the flower-bulb heiress was, after all, their friend, felt appalled and slightly frightened at what they had done. They thought of dropping some note of warning into the letter of introduction which of course they would have to write. But then they reflected that if Miss Grabbe was richer than they, she was also proportionately shrewder: glass bricks only could Mr. Sciarappa sell her for that sub-

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marine architectural salon she spoke of opening in the depths of the Grand Canal. Miss Grabbe's intelligence was flighty (she had once forgotten to include the furnace in a winter house that so hugged the idea of warmth that the bathtubs were done in buff), but her estimates were sharp; no contractor or husband had ever padded a bill on her; she always put on her glasses to add up a dinner check. Men, it was true, had injured her, and movements had left her flat, but these misadventures she had cheerfully added to her capital. An indefatigable Narcissa, she adapted herself spryly to comedy when she perceived that the world was smiling; she was always the second to laugh at a prat-fall of her spirit. Mr. Sciarappa, at worst, could only be another banana-peel on the vaudeville stage of her history. It was possible, of course, that he might bore her, thought the two friends, reasoning from experience; this alone she would not forgive them, yet Miss Grabbe's judgments of men were often strikingly lenient—she had been unattached when they left her in Paris.

Besides, Mr. Sciarappa was looking quite presentable this evening, even though he had not yet changed his suit. Bright, eager, intensely polite, useful, informative, he seemed once more the figure they had seen in the train corridor; some innocent, cavalier hope that had died in those long Milan evenings had revived in him, as the expectation of parting made the two friends recede from him a little and become strangers once more. The letter of introduction wrote itself out, somehow, more affectionately than the friends had planned it. "Enclosed," it said, "please find Mr. Sciarappa, who has been most helpful to us in Milan."

Signorina Grabbe was waiting alone with a gondola in the orange-lampshade glow of a Canaletto sunset when their autobus drew up, two days later, at the station. Against the Venetian panorama of white domes and pink towers, Mr. Sciarappa was so pronouncedly absent that it seemed an indelicacy to inquire after him. The two friends, whom solitude and a consciousness of indiscretion had worked up to a pitch of anxiety and melodramatic conjecture, now felt slightly provoked that Miss Grabbe had not, in this short interval, been married or murdered for her money. At the very least, they had expected to be scolded for sending her that curious envoy,

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but Mr. Sciarappa's arrival seemed barely to have disturbed Miss Grabbe, who had been busy, so she said, with an inner experience. "Your friend turned up," she remarked at last, in the tone of one who acknowledges a package. "What on earth did you find to talk to him about?" The young man groaned. Miss Grabbe had put her rich, plump, practiced finger on the flaw in Mr. Sciarappa as prosaically as if he had been a piece of yard-goods—was there nothing more to be said of him? "We found him rather odd," the young man murmured in half-apology. "Oh, my dear," said Miss Grabbe, raising her dyed black eyebrows, "all the men you meet on the *wagons-lits* are like that. You must go to the little *campos* and the *trattorias* to meet the real Italians."

And as Miss Grabbe went on to talk, in the dipping, swaying gondola, of the intense, insular experience she had found, blazing as the native *grappa,* in the small, hot squares, the working-class restaurants and dirty churches of Venice, Mr. Sciarappa seemed indeed a poor thing to have offered her, a gimcrack souvenir such as one might have bought in a railway station. The young man blushed angrily as he felt his own trip and that of the young lady shrink to fit inside Mr. Sciarappa's nipped-in gabardine suit. He was only saved from despair by a memory of Miss Grabbe, as he had last seen her in Paris, alone, with her hunter's look, and three saucers under her vermouth glass, at a table in a Left Bank café—"Isn't it divine?" she had called out to him, "don't you love it, don't you hate New York?"

Compared to Miss Grabbe, he perceived, he himself and the young lady would always appear to skim the surface of travel. They were tourists; Miss Grabbe was an explorer. Looking at the two ladies as they sat facing him in the gondola, he saw that their costumes perfectly expressed this difference: the young lady's large black hat, long gloves, high-heeled shoes, and nylon stockings were a declaration of nationality and a stubborn assertion of the pleasure-principle (what a nuisance that hat had been as it scraped against his neck on the autobus, on the train, in the Metro in Paris); Miss Grabbe's snood and sandals, her bright glass-bead jewelry, her angora sweater, and shoulder-strap leather handbag, all Italian as the *merceria,* she wore in the manner of a uniform that announced her mobility in action and her support of the native products. Moreover, her brown

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face had a weather-beaten look, as though it had been exposed to the glare of many merciless suns; and her eyes blazed out of the sun-tan powder around them with the bright blue stare of a scout; only her pretty, tanned legs suggested a life less hardy—they might have been going to the beach. Like Mr. Sciarappa (for all his little graces), Miss Grabbe seemed to have been parched and baked by exposure, hardened and chapped by the winds of rebuff and failure. In contrast, the young lady, with her pallor and her smile, looked faintly unreal, like a photograph of a girl whose engagement has just been announced. And the young man felt himself joined to her in this sheltered and changeless beatitude; at the same time, in the company of Miss Grabbe as in that of Mr. Sciarappa, he was aware of a slight discomfort, a sense of fatuity, like the brief, antagonized embarrassment he noticed in himself whenever, in answer to the inevitable question, he replied, with a touch of storminess, that he was traveling in Europe for pleasure.

That he and the young lady were happy became, in this context, a crime, or, at best, a breach of taste, like the conspicuous idleness of the rich. They could hardly, he remarked to himself, be expected to give up their mutual delight because others were not so fortunate; they had already settled this question with regard to steak and *cotolette*. Yet, catching Miss Grabbe's eye measuring his happiness in the gondola, he felt inclined to withdraw his feelings to some more private place, just as certain sensitive patrons of restaurants preferred nowadays to feast indoors, secure from the appraisal of the poor. His state, as he well knew, was of peculiar interest to Miss Grabbe: for twenty years, Polly Grabbe had made herself famous by coming to Europe, semi-annually, in pursuit of love. These sorties of hers had the regularity and the directness of buyers' trips that are signalized by a paid notice in the Paris *Herald,* announcing to the dressmaking trade that Miss Blank of Franklin Simon is staying at the Crillon. Under the eye of that transatlantic experience, the young man felt a little discomfited, as if he had been modeling a housedress before a cosmopolite audience. He had no wish to judge Miss Grabbe, yet he felt installed in a judgment by the dream of perpetual monogamy into which the young lady had invited him. In an effort to extricate himself, he inquired of Miss Grabbe very civilly, as one traveler to another, how

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she found the Venetian men, but the heiress only stared at him coldly and asked what he took her for.

Miss Grabbe was aware of her legend; it half-pleased her, and yet she resented it, for, at bottom, she was naively unconscious of the plain purport of her acts. She imagined that she came abroad out of a cultural impatience with America; in her own eyes, she was always a rebel against a commercial civilization. She hoped to be remembered for her architectural experiments, her patronage of the arts, her championship of personal freedom, and flattered herself that in Europe this side of her was taken seriously. Men in America, she complained, thought only about business, and the European practice of making a business of love seemed to her, in contrast, the mark of an advanced civilization. Sexual intercourse, someone had taught her, was a quick transaction with the beautiful, and she proceeded to make love, whenever she traveled, as ingenuously as she trotted into a cathedral: men were a continental commodity of which one naturally took advantage, along with the wine and the olives, the bitter coffee and the crusty bread. Miss Grabbe, despite her boldness, was not an original woman, and her boldness, in fact, consisted in taking everything literally. She made love in Europe because it was the thing to do, because European lovers were superior to American lovers ("My dear," she told the young lady, "there's all the difference in the *world*—it's like comparing the very best California claret to the simplest little *vin du pays*"), because she believed it was good for her, especially in hot climates, and because one was said to learn languages a great deal more readily in bed. The rapid turnover of her lovers did not particularly disconcert her; she took a quantitative view and sought for a *wealth* of sensations. She liked to startle and to shock, yet positively did not understand why people considered her immoral. A prehensile approach, she inferred, was laudable where values were in question—what was the beautiful *for,* if not to be seized and savored?

For Polly Grabbe, as for the big luxury liners and the small school teachers with their yearly piety of Europe, the war had been an enforced hiatus. Though she had wished for the defeat of Hitler and been generous with money to his victims, in her heart she had waited for it to be over with a purely personal impatience. She was among the first to return when travel was once again permitted, an

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odd, bedizened, little figure, alighting gallantly from the plane, making a spot of color among the American businessmen, her vulturine co-passengers, who were descending on Europe to "look after" their investments. Conditions in Paris shocked these men, deep in their business sense, and Miss Grabbe was dismayed also; her own investment had been swept away. She could not take up where she had left off: people were dead or dispersed or in prison; her past stood about her in fragments, a shattered face looming up here and there like a house-wall in a bombed city; normalcy was far away. But Miss Grabbe did not lack courage. She had learned how to say goodbye and to look ahead for the next thing. Paris, she quickly decided, was beautiful but done for, a shell from which the life had retreated out into the suburbs where a few old friends still persisted, a shell now inhabited by an alien existentialist gossip, and an alien troupe of young men who cadged drinks from her in languid boredom and made love only to each other. Her trip to Italy, therefore, had the character of a farewell and a new beginning, and the hotel suite, into which she now showed the two friends, resembled a branch office which had been opened but was not yet in full operation.

The wide *letto matrimoniale* in the bedroom, the washstand, and the bidet with the towel over it, the dressing-table on which were arranged, very neatly and charmingly, Miss Grabbe's toilet waters and perfumes, her powders and lucite brush and comb, her lipsticks, orange sticks, and tweezers, all had an air unmistakably functional, to which the books and magazines, the cigarettes and pretty colored postcards set out, invitingly, in the sitting room contributed their share, so that it was not so surprising as it might have been to see, when the balcony doors were opened, the figure of Mr. Sciarappa lounging on the terrace, like a waiting client, with a copy of *Life*.

This conception of his position, however, seemed not to have struck Mr. Sciarappa. He was there, it seemed, simply for the practical joke of it, for their shrieks, for Miss Grabbe's discomfiture. He laughed at them with candid merriment, saying, "*Caro,* I give you a surprise." The two friends had not seen him so lively since one night in Milan when a tired fat woman, running for a tramcar, had failed to catch it. He showed no inclination at all to step into the role that stood there, ready for him to try on. He had come, he said,

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as a courier, proposing to take them to dinner, to the Piazza San Marco, to Harry's Bar, where the smart English officers went and the international set with their electric-blue suits, blond mistresses, heavy jaws, and decorations from Balkan kings. With all these little offices and services, his mind was completely occupied. His original mission, Miss Grabbe, had plainly dropped into some *oubliette* of his faculties, and the two friends, observing him, could nearly have sworn that his sole purpose in coming to Venice had been to prepare a place for them, like Jesus for his disciples in Heaven.

Dinner, however, soon restored him to his normal state of disaffection. Once the four were seated upstairs, in the yellow lamplight at Quadri's, he was his old self, bored, petulant, abstracted. He jumped up from his chair with almost indecent agility to speak to a bearded gentleman in a respectable suit of clothes, coming back finally to announce that this was Prince Rucellai, an illustrious Florentine nobleman who practiced the trade of antique-dealer. In the manner of all Mr. Sciarappa's native acquaintances, the prince at once quitted the restaurant, but Mr. Sciarappa's attention went with him out into the square, abandoning the Americans summarily for the evening. It was as if he suffered from some curious form of amnesia that made him mislay his purpose halfway on the road to accomplishment. He was in Venice and could not remember why, and he stayed on hoping, somehow, for a refreshment of his memory. Now and then, during the following days, the Americans would find him looking at them with a curious concentration, as though their appearance might recall to him his motive in seeking their society. From Miss Grabbe, on the contrary, whose emeralds should have furnished him his clue, he persistently averted his eyes.

The little bohemian heiress, in fact, was the center of his inattention, an inattention principled and profound. From the very first night, apparently, she had associated herself in his mind with culture, and hence, merely by talking about them, she had fallen into the class of objects—cathedrals, works of art, museums, palaces maintained by the state—which, by being free to all, were valuable, in his opinion, to none. And by the same trick by which he substituted an empty space for the cathedral in the Piazza San Marco, he "vanished" Miss Grabbe from the table at dinner. The possibility of her

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buying a palazzo, which she spoke of continually, he simply declined to credit. His business interest, it would seem, was far too deep to be aroused by it, and no commission could be large enough to make him expand his idea of money to accommodate within it the living heresy of Miss Grabbe. All over Venice, volunteer real-estate agents were at work for her, the concierge at the Grand Hotel, the lift-boy, a gondolier, two Communist painters in a studio across the Canal. Mr. Sciarappa only smiled impatiently whenever this project was mentioned, and once he nudged the young lady and significantly tapped his head.

Miss Grabbe, for her part, was unaware of his feelings. The first evening on the balcony, she had expressed herself strongly against him. Pointing dramatically to the blue lagoon, the towers, the domes, the clouds, the Palladian front of San Giorgio, all as pink and white, as airy, watery, clear, and neat as the bottles and puffs on her own dressing-table, she had taken the young man's arm and invited him to choose. "My dear, why do you see him? He is not our sort," she had said. "Life is too short. He will spoil Venice for you if you let him." The young man had simply stared. Mr. Sciarappa was a nuisance, but he felt no inclination to trade him for the Venetian "experience." The bargain was too sharp for his nature. If Mr. Sciarappa obstructed the European view, he also replaced it. The mystery of Europe lay in him as solidly as in the stones of Venice, and it was somewhat less worn by previous inquisitive travelers. Night after night, he and the young lady would sit up examining Mr. Sciarappa with the refined passion of connoisseurs. It was true that sometimes at the dinner-hour they would try to give him the slip, yet they felt a certain relief whenever he rose from behind a potted plant in the hotel lobby to claim, once again, their company. He had become a problem for them in both senses of the word: the impossibility of talking *with* him was compensated for by the possibilities of talking about him, and the detachment of their attitude was, they felt, atoned for by their neighborliness in the physical sphere. How much, in fact, they had come to feel that they owed Mr. Sciarappa their company, they did not recognize until the afternoon, extraordinary to them, when he was not on hand to collect the debt.

The day of the fiesta he silently disappeared. Like everyone else in Venice he had been planning on the occasion. Colored lan-

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terns had been attached to the gondolas, floats were being decked, and rumors, gay as paper flowers, promised a night of license, masking, and folly. A party of English tourists was expected; Miss Grabbe was trying on eighteenth-century court costumes with the Communists across the Canal. Apparently, Mr. Sciarappa had set this as the date of his own liberation, for at the apéritif hour he was not to be seen, either at the hotel or, as he had stipulated, in the Piazza. The two friends connected his disappearance with the arrival of the English tourists, for at the first mention of their existence, his mind had ducked underground, into the tunnel where his real life was conducted. They had known him long enough to see him as a city of Catacombs, and to interpret his lapses of attention as signs of the keenest interest; his silences were the camouflaged entrances to the Plutonian realm of his thoughts. Nevertheless, they felt slightly shocked and abandoned. Like many intellectual people, they were alarmed by the confirmation of theories—was the world as small as the mind? They telephoned their hotel twice, but their friend had left no messages for them, and, disturbed, they allowed Miss Grabbe to go off with her maskers while they watched on the cold jetty the little gondolas chasing up and down the Canal in pursuit of the great floating orchestra which everybody had seen in the afternoon but which now, like Mr. Sciarappa, had unaccountably disappeared.

Some time later, they perceived Mr. Sciarappa alone in a gondola that was rapidly making for the pier. They would not have recognized him had he not called out effusively, "Ah, my friends, I am looking for you all over Venice tonight."

The full force of this lie was lost on them, for they were less astonished to find Scampi in a falsehood than to find him in a new suit. In dark blue and white stripes, he stepped out of the gondola; gold links gleamed at his wrists; his face was soft from the barbershop, and a strong fragrance of Chanel caused passers-by to turn to stare at them. The bluish-white glare from the dome of San Giorgio, lit up for the occasion, fell on him, accentuating the moment. The heavier material had added a certain substantiality to him; like the men in Harry's Bar, he looked sybaritic, prosperous, and vain. But this transfiguration was, it became clear, merely the afterglow of some hope that had already set for him. Wherever he had been, he had

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failed to accomplish his object, if indeed he had had an object beyond the vague adventure of a carnival night. He was more nervous than ever, and he invited them to join him on the Canal in the manner of a man who is weighing the security of companionship against the advantages of the lone hand. The two friends declined, and he put off once more in the gondola, saying, "Well, my dears, you are right; it is just a tourist fiesta." The two retired to their window to wonder whether the English tourists, and not themselves or Miss Grabbe, had not been, after all, the real Venetian attraction. The *Inglesi*'s arrival might well have been anticipated in a newspaper, particularly since they had the reputation of being rich collectors of furniture. Mr. Sciarappa's restless behavior, irrational in a pursuer who has already come up with his prey, was appropriate enough to the boredom and anxiety of waiting. Indeed, sometimes, watching him drum on the table, they had said to themselves that he behaved toward them like a passenger who is detained between trains in a provincial railroad station and vainly tries to interest himself in the billboard and the ticket collector.

Miss Grabbe had taken very little part in all this mental excitement. So far as the two friends could see, he had no erotic interest for her. She was as adamant to his virility as he to the evidence of her money—it would have disturbed all her preconceptions to discover sex in a business suit. She received his disappearance calmly, saying, "I thought you wanted to get rid of him—he has probably found bigger fish." In general, after her first protest, she had grown accustomed to Mr. Sciarappa, in the manner of the rich. For her he did not assume prominence through the frequency of his attendance, but on the contrary he receded into the surroundings in the fashion of a piece of furniture that is "lived with." She opened and closed him like a guidebook whenever she needed the name of a hotel or a hairdresser or had forgotten the Italian for what she wanted to say to the waiter. Having money, she had little real curiosity; she was not a dependent of the world. It did not occur to her to inquire why he had come, nor did she ask when he would leave. She too spoke of him as "Scampi," but tolerantly, without resentment, as nice women call a dog a rascal. She was not, despite appearances, a woman of strong convictions; she accepted any current situation as normative and was

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not anxious for change. Her money had made her insular; she was used to a mercenary circle and had no idea that outside it lovers showed affection, friends repaid kindness, and husbands did not ask an allowance or bring their mistresses home to bed. So now she accepted Mr. Sciarappa's dubious presence without particular question; it struck her as far less unnatural than the daily affection she witnessed between the young man and the young lady. She domesticated all the queerness of his being with them in Venice. "My dear," she remonstrated with the young man, "he simply wants to sell us something," dissipating Sciarappa as succinctly as if he had been a Fuller Brush man at the door. It irritated them slightly that she would not see the problem of Sciarappa, and they did not guess that now, when they had given up expecting it, she would grapple with their problem more matter-of-factly than they. While the two friends slept, through the night of the fiesta she and Mr. Sciarappa made love; when he departed, in dressing-gown and slippers, she thanked him "for a very pleasant evening."

Mr. Sciarappa, however, did not stay to cement the relationship. He left Venice precipitately, as though retreating ahead of Miss Grabbe's revelations. He was gone the next afternoon, without spoken adieux, leaving behind him a list of the second-best restaurants in Florence for the young lady, with an asterisk marking the ones where he was personally known to the headwaiter. "Unhappily," his note ran, "one cannot be on a holiday forever." On a final zigzag of policy he had careened away from them into the inexplicable. Now that he had declared himself in action, his motives seemed the more obscure. What, in fact, had he been up to? It was impossible to find out from Miss Grabbe, for to her mind sex went without explanations; it seemed to her perfectly ordinary that two strangers who were indifferent to each other should spend the night locked in the privacies of love.

Sitting up in bed, surrounded by hot-water bottles (for she had caught cold in her stomach), she received the two friends at tea-time and related her experiences of the night, using confession matter-of-factly, as a species of feminine hygiene, to disinfect her spirit of any lingering touch of the man. Scampi, she said, accepting the nickname from the young man as a kind of garment for the Italian gentleman,

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who seemed to stand there before them, shivering and slightly chicken-breasted in the nude, Scampi, she said, was very nice, but not in any way remarkable, the usual Italian man. He had taken her back from the fiesta, where the orchestra had never been found and she had grown tired of the painters, who looked ridiculous in costume when no one else was dressed. He had pinched her bottom on the Riva and undressed her on the balcony; they had tussled and gone to bed. Upon the cold stage of Miss Grabbe's bald narrative, he capered in and out like a grotesque, now naked chasing her naked onto the balcony, now gorgeous in a silk dressing-gown and slippers tiptoeing down the corridor of the hotel, now correct in light tan pajamas dutifully, domestically, turning out the light. For a moment, they saw him all shrunken and wizened. ("My dear, he is much older than you think," said Miss Grabbe confidentially), and another glimpse revealed him in an aspect still more intimate and terrible, tossing the scapular he wore about his neck, and which hung down and interfered with his love-making, back again and again, lightly, flippantly, recklessly, over his thin shoulder.

"Stop," cried the young lady, seizing the young man's hands and pressing them in an agony of repentance to her own bosom. "Does it shock you?" inquired Miss Grabbe, lifting her black eyebrows. "Darling, you *gave* me Sciarappa."

"No, no," begged the young lady, for it seemed to her that this was not at all what they had wanted, this mortal exposé, but that, on the contrary, they had had in mind something more sociological, more humane—biographical details, Mr. Sciarappa's relation with his parents, his social position, his business, his connection with the Fascist state. But of all this, of course, Miss Grabbe could tell them nothing. The poor Italian, hunted down, defenseless, surprised in bed by a party of intruders, had yielded nothing but his manhood. His motives, his status, his true public and social self, everything that the young lady now called "the really interesting part about him," he had carried off with him to Rome intact. He was gone and had left them with his skin, withered, dry, unexpectedly old. Through Miss Grabbe, they had come as close to him bodily as the laws of nature permit, and there at the core there was nothing—they had known him better in the Galleria in Milan. As for the affective side of him,

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the emotions and sentiments, here too he had eluded them. Miss Grabbe's net had been too coarse to catch whatever small feelings had escaped him during the encounter.

A sense of desolation descended on the room, the usual price of confidences. It was a relief when one of the Communist painters came in with some lira, which Miss Grabbe put in her douche-bag. The two friends exchanged a glance of illumination. Had this repository for his country's debased currency proved too casual for Mr. Sciarappa's sense of honor? Was this the cause of his flight? If so, was it the lira or his manhood that was insulted? Or were the two, in the end, indistinguishable?

The two friends could never be sure, and when they left Venice shortly afterwards they were still debating whether some tactlessness of Miss Grabbe's had set Scampi at last in motion or whether his own action, by committing him for an hour or so, had terrified him into instant removal. He was a theoretician of practice so pure, they said to each other on the bus, that any action must appear to him as folly because of the risks to his shrewdness that it involved, a man so worldly that he saw the world as a lie too transparent to fool Rino Sciarappa, who was clever and knew the ropes. As they passed through the bony Apennines, the landscape itself seemed to wear a face baked and disabused as Mr. Sciarappa's own, and thus to give their theories a geological and national cast. The terraced fields lay scorched, like Mr. Sciarappa's wrinkles, on the gaunt umber-colored hillsides; like his vernal hopes, plants sprang up only to die here, and the land had the mark of wisdom—it too had seen life. After these reflections, it was a little anticlimactic to meet, half an hour after their arrival in Florence, the face of Italian history, whose destination had been announced as Rome. "He is following us, but he is ahead," said the young man, abandoning historical explanations forever. Only one conclusion seemed possible—he must be a spy.

In Florence, at any rate, he appeared to be acquainted; he introduced them to a number of American girls who worked in United States offices and to one or two young men who wore American uniforms. All of these people, as he had once promised them in Venice, called him by his first name; yet when the dinner-hour drew near the whole party vanished as agilely as Mr. Sciarappa, and the two

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friends found themselves once more going to his favorite restaurant, drinking his favorite wine, and being snubbed first by the waiter and then by their impatient guide. If he was a spy, however, his superiors must at last have given him a new assignment, for the next day he left Florence, not without giving the young lady his restaurant key to Rome.

In Rome, curiosity led them, at long last, and with some reluctance, to investigate his address, which he had written out in the young lady's address book long ago, on the train, outside Domodossola, when their acquaintance had promised to be of somewhat shorter duration. As their steps turned into the dusty Via San Ignazio, they felt their hearts quicken. The European enigma and its architectural solution lay just before them, around a bend in the street, and they still, in spite of everything, should not have been surprised to find a renaissance palace, a coat of arms, and a liveried manservant just inside the door. But the house was plain and shabby; it was impossible to conceive of Mr. Sciarappa's gabardines proceeding deftly through the entrance. Looking at this yellow house, at the unshaven tenant regarding them from the third-story window, and the mattress and the geranium in the fourth, the two friends felt a return of that mortification and unseemly embarrassment they had experienced in Miss Grabbe's bedroom. This house too was an obscenity, like the shrunken skin and the scapular, but it also was a shell which Rino Sciarappa did not truly inhabit. By common consent, they turned silently away from it, with a certain distaste which, oddly enough, was not directed at Mr. Sciarappa or his residence, but, momentarily, at each other. The relation between pursuer and pursued had been confounded, by a dialectic too subtle for their eyes.

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Rayner Heppenstall

TWO NOVELS BY LÉON BLOY

The literary function of the Catholic faith in the nineteenth century was to provide occasions for blasphemy. On the level of ordinary life, we may broadly accept the Marxist view and see in continental Catholicism no more than a conservative ideology. We must not presume that the blasphemies uttered self-consciously by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and (on the smaller scale of this predominantly Calvinist country) Lionel Johnson and Oscar Wilde were wholly devoid of genuine anguish. Nevertheless, the general literary trend was to use the Catholic faith and its trappings as so many holy objects to be amusingly profaned by the *enfant terrible*. Profanation was a theatrical effect. This is clearest of all in Baudelaire. The juxtaposition of the sacred and the sordid was his life's work and the basis of his poetic achievement. Such juxtaposition for effect had taken place spasmodically in all romantic poetry. It is present in Goethe's *Faust*. The romantic movement was very largely a prolonged Witches' Sabbath. But Baudelaire isolated and completed the trick. Baudelaire's disgust extended even to the trick itself. After him, blasphemy became less and less amusing because even the emotional nucleus of belief had gone. The romantic movement petered out in Huysmans and Barbey d'Aurevilly, Baron Corvo and Thornton Wilder, Jean de Bosschère and the Rev. Montague Summers, and its last productions verge closer and closer on pornography.

Four writers restored the Catholic faith in England and France. They were John Henry Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Charles Péguy and Léon Bloy. Catholic stage-properties had never quite vanished from the literary scene, but there had been no belief. For the first time in a hundred years, four great writers believed. Even in Italy, no major literary figure had believed since Manzoni,

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and Manzoni though he lived till 1873, had reached the peak of his achievement in the century's first quarter.

The restoration of Catholic belief produced quite different effects in England and in France. In England, where there had been no vast inert mass of *bien-pensants,* Catholicism very quickly became smart. The main pleasure of English Catholic publicists like Monsignor Ronald Knox, Arnold Lunn, and their younger colleagues lies in demonstrating how muddle-headed other people's thinking is, how imprecise their terms and their intentions. This movement is partly counterbalanced by the sentimental medievalism of Chesterton and Gill, but even Chesterton was a great one for proving that nothing is new under the sun. In France, where imprecision of thought had never been the most obvious sign of the secular or indeed the anticlerical mind, similar antics and grimaces were scarcely possible. In France, the renewal of belief involved in the first place a denunciation of the nominally Catholic bourgeoisie for its tepidity and for its material acquisitiveness. Thus the *renouveau spirituel* was by no means a movement of political reaction. Péguy never quite knew whether he was primarily a Catholic or primarily a socialist. Léon Bloy delivered the whole weight of his massive eloquence against *les bien-pensants,* against what he calls *la bondieuserie sulpicienne,* against the rich and against bourgeois mediocrity. As a great many of us remember with gratitude, Jacques Maritain and Georges Bernanos stuck out for the simple facts of the matter during the Spanish insurrection of General Franco, when the English Catholics were almost unanimously crying crusade.

The forms in which Catholic intellectuals have chosen to express themselves have similarly varied between the two countries. England produced a major Catholic poet, and since then Catholic intellectuals in this country have contented themselves with general pronouncements and wireless talks. In Graham Greene, we have a novelist of distinction who also happens to be a Catholic, but that he can be regarded as a Catholic novelist in the same sense as François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos is very much open to question, though in *The Power and the Glory* he for once attempted the Bernanos manner and though in a recent issue of *La France Libre* he pays respectful homage to Mauriac. On the other hand, in France, Mauriac and

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Bernanos, novelists, are two of the four unquestionably dominant Catholic writers, the third (Claudel) being a poet and dramatist, and only the fourth (Maritain) a publicist.

The French Catholic novel of today was initiated single-handed by Léon Bloy. This will of itself perhaps explain Bloy's own rather exiguous and frequently confused achievement in the form. For he wrote but two novels, and as a novel neither of them is fully satisfying. Yet it is as a novelist that he should be regarded, because of the trend of his influence and because his writing outside the form of the novel also has a narrative and dramatic rather than an ideological movement.

One of the two novels, *The Woman Who Was Poor,*[1] exists in English translation. Of an *oeuvre* of some forty books, the only other to be found in English is *Letters to his Fiancée.*[2] These two were published by Messrs. Sheed and Ward in 1937, and neither sold. A number of translated extracts from *Exégèse des Lieux communs* had previously appeared in Bernard Wall's short-lived *Colosseum* in 1935, together with the translation of a pamphlet on Bloy by Maritain. Karl Pfleger's *Wrestlers with Christ* (1936) contains an essay on Bloy, and there were some notes on him by Richard Kehoe, O.P., in *Blackfriars* for January, 1936. That seems to be the English total. In France, numerous books have been devoted to Bloy. On my own shelves, which are by no means those of a specialist, I find five, by Pierre Termier, Léopold Levaux, Hubert Colleye, Stanislas Fumet, and Ernest Seillière.[3] I believe that before the war there was even a quarterly of Bloy studies under the title *Les Cahiers Léon Bloy.* Jacques Maritain is a convert and godson of Bloy's. In his opinion, Bloy wrote the finest French prose since Bossuet.

Le Désespéré (1887) has at least one of the technical virtues of a good novel. Its themes are unambiguously present on the first page. There is no prolonged clearing of the throat. The novel opens with the hero, Caïn Marchenoir (Bloy himself), writing a letter to Alexis Dulaurier (Bourget? Huysmans?) to ask for money with which to bury his father who is just about to die of horror at his son's

[1] *La Femme pauvre.*

[2] *Lettres à sa fiancée.* These were also the first to be published in German.

[3] A birth centenary vol. by Albert Béguin has now appeared in translation.

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violent and improvident ways. "I am writing to you," says Marchenoir, "because a soul given over to its own nothingness is without other recourse than to the futile literary gymnastic feat of formulating that nothingness." What did Marchenoir *père* represent? Mediocrity. Is Dulaurier the constant friend of Marchenoir's misery? No. Marchenoir despises him. His reason for writing to Dulaurier is that Dulaurier has a lot of money which he does not deserve. Marchenoir-Bloy characterized himself elsewhere (it is the title of one of his eight diaries) as "the ungrateful beggar." Part One of *Le Désespéré* proceeds to the narration of Dulaurier's successful but unedifying literary career and his condescending ill-treatment of Marchenoir. Follows a retrospective account of Marchenoir's early life, his sudden conversion *"durant l'oisive chaufferie de pieds d'une nuit de grand'garde, en 1870,"* his struggles to gain a footing in the post-war literary world, a series of extremely unattractive love-affairs, and the discovery of Véronique. Marchenoir *père* dies and is buried at Périgueux. His son receives money from a devoted friend, an engraver, Leverdier, and goes to the Grande Chartreuse to make a retreat.

This narrative follows Bloy's own life-story closely. Born in 1846 and a pauper for the greater part of his life, Bloy was in fact the recipient of some form of mystical illumination in the night watches during the war of 1870. He was, in fact, born at Périgueux, and his inability to force a living out of journalism was not entirely due to his own intransigence, though Barbey d'Aurevilly and Ernest Hello befriended him. Bloy had his period of debauchery. *"Il avait été chaste à la manière des prisonniers et des matelots, lesquels ne voient ordinairement dans l'amour qu'une désiderable friction malpropre, en l'obscurité de coûteux repaires."* He subsequently *"fit de l'amour extatique dans des lits de boue, avec une conscience dilacérée."* Upon the death of his father, Bloy made a retreat at the Trappist monastery of Soligny and entertained the monastic life as a possibility for himself. He did not like the Trappists and substituted for Soligny, in his novel, the Grande Chartreuse, where he later made a happier retreat. But the chief divergence from autobiographical fact in Part One is found when we come to Véronique. And here, dealing with the most lacerating episode of his own life, Bloy fails conspicuously. The

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story as it is told in the novel is dramatically inferior to the episode as it in fact took place.

The Véronique of real life was called Anne-Marie Roulet. Like the Véronique of the novel (though with less domestic and financial excuse), she was a prostitute. Under the influence of Bloy, she began to exhibit symptoms of sanctity and illumination and recounted to Bloy visions and prophecies which underlie a great deal of his work. In the end, she went mad. She was Bloy's mistress for a time. The most heroic moral feat of Bloy's life was the breaking of sexual relationship with Anne-Marie Roulet while maintaining the closest religious and spiritual (or psychological) intimacy with her. In the novel, Marchenoir contrives to redeem Véronique without sleeping with her. It is too easy. Véronique falls in love with Marchenoir. He converts by denying her. This is reminiscent of the cut-and-dried psychology of Paul Bourget, of which Bloy was frequently contemptuous. The truth was in this case more interesting. In Part One of *Le Désespéré,* there is no sufficient conflict.

Part Two covers the period of religious retreat at the Grande Chartreuse. Letters are exchanged between Marchenoir and Véronique which indicate that Marchenoir, having established his lack of a vocation for the religious life, is falling in love with Véronique, but that the process torments him.

Upon his return to Paris, in Part Three, Marchenoir is confronted with one of the most ludicrous and shocking situations in world fiction. Leverdier relates to his friend how Véronique, in order to prevent Marchenoir falling in love with her, has cut off her hair (which hung to her knees), has sold the hair (to a taxidermist?) and, with the proceeds, has gone to a Jew of doubtful occupation and paid him to pull out all her teeth. *"A cet énoncé inouï, Marchenoir tourna sur lui-même et, s'éloignant obliquement, à la façon d'un aliéné, les deux bras croisés sur sa tête, se mit à exhaler des rauquements horribles."* And well he might. Bloy's refusal to present his sainted harlot as she was has involved him in the most dreadful plight, coupled as it is with a serious lack of humor. Véronique in the novel is not mad (she becomes so quite unexpectedly in the last few pages), yet she does what could only not be ludicrous in a mad woman. Of the real Anne-Marie Roulet, just before she became

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really high, the incident of the teeth could have been recounted and would have seemed credible. In Véronique, it is presented by Bloy as a further symptom of great character, perhaps indeed as a direct result of the influx of supernatural grace (and let us remember that Bloy was forty years old when he wrote *Le Désespéré*). But of this extraordinary silliness in Bloy, we shall find other, though less glaring, instances.

The extraction of Véronique's teeth solves none of Marchenoir's problems. It enables him to rail further at the mediocrity of priests, one of whom, Véronique's director, ticks her off severely, failing to appreciate the sublimity of her action. But in the end Marchenoir concludes that Véronique, without teeth and hair, is not less, but more, beautiful. He becomes increasingly amorous of her, and yet the two continue to inhabit the same apartment in the same odd condition of *concubinage céleste*. Working at his book on the divine symbolism of history one night, Marchenoir loses control of himself and staggers, with endless *grincements* and panting, to Véronique's door, only to find that she has been praying all night. This cools him off. When Véronique does in the end go mad, Marchenoir is run over on the way back from the asylum. The novel concludes, as it began, with a letter, this time to Leverdier, the constant friend, who is in the country. Marchenoir dies without priest. He dies, like his father, of mediocrity, but of other people's mediocrity and not his own. He also dies of poverty, the superlative crime.

I have tried in this summary neither to simplify facetiously nor to extenuate the naïvete and clumsiness of *Le Désespéré*. What cannot be made plain in a summary is how little the quality of the book depends upon its plot. It is the flow of metaphysical fantasy which keeps the book going. The incidents hold it up. Unfortunately, Marchenoir's professional difficulties also hold it up. Part Four and Five consist almost wholly of two episodes in the literary world, first a party given by Properce Beauvivier[4] who wishes to give Marchenoir a build-up for his own purposes and, second, Marchenoir's attempt

[4] It is always very difficult to identify the literary figures whom Bloy introduces into his novels, because he hated every big name of his day and always for the same reasons. However, he felt a particular fury against Bourget, Huysmans, and Louis Veuillot, and one or all three of these is probably contained in any of the lay figures he dresses up.

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to start a magazine (Bloy's own *Le Pal,* of which four numbers appeared). How culpable are the mandarins of the day is a matter on which successful and unsuccessful writers differ. Certainly there are literary vested interests, and certainly a number of writers in any age fall foul of them, and certainly Bloy should not have been allowed to starve as he did. Nevertheless his railing was inaccurate, uncharitable, and a waste of his own time. The passages in *Le Désespéré* which are of unquestionable excellence are certain descriptions of the Grande Chartreuse, the account of Marchenoir's (Bloy's own) conversion, and some briefer dogmatic-exegetical rhapsodies on Christ the Poor Man, the central figure in Bloy's general mythology.

The prose at its best is magnificent. In its color and its rhetorical weight, it is un-French. In its dependence upon epithet it is wholly French. Bloy characterizes his own writing in that of Marchenoir and speaks of *"la violente couleur de l'écrivain, sa barbarie cauteleuse et alambiquée; l'insistance giratoire, l'enroulement têtu de certaines images cruelles revenant avec obstination sur elles-mêmes commes les convolvulacées; l'audace inouïe de cette forme, nombreuse autant qu'une horde et si rapide, quoique pesamment armée; le tumulte sage de ce vocabulaire panaché de flammes et de cendres ainsi que le Vésuve aux derniers jours de Pompéi, balafré d'or, incrusté, crénelé, denticulé de gemmes antiques, à la façon d'une châsse de martyr; mais surtout l'élargissement prodigieux qu'un pareil style conférait soudain à la moins ambitieuse des thèses, au postulat le plus infime et le plus acclimaté."* Of the writer's function he says elsewhere, *"Il ne reste plus que l'Art. Un art proscrit, il est vrai, méprisé, subalternisé, famélique, fugitif, guenilleux et catacombal. Mais, quand même, c'est l'unique refuge pour quelques âmes altissimes condamnées à traîner leur souffrante carcasse dans les charogneux carrefours du monde."* I think it was Laura Riding who clearly laid down that French is the language of the adjective, as German of the noun, and English of exact meaning. Certainly these passages could not be translated into English without rendering some of the epithets by elaborate clauses.

The Woman Who Was Poor (1897) is shorter, less purely

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autobiographical, less unrelievedly gloomy, and more skilful than *Le Désespéré*. Its digressions are more pertinent and at the same time more quotable. The first part of the book displays even a sense of humor, and a moral situation of the kind later developed by François Mauriac is clearly present. Marchenoir, who died at the end of *Le Désespéré,* reappears (and dies again) in *The Woman Who Was Poor,* but he is not the central figure. His place is taken by a new avatar of Anne-Marie Roulet, this time given the name of Clotilde Maréchal. Only at the beginning of the book is she placed in a setting resembling that of the real-life Anne-Marie. She does not go mad. She does not live in *concubinage céleste* with Marchenoir. On the contrary she marries a friend of Marchenoir, a book-illustrator and man of action, Léopold (Bloy himself had begun his career as an illuminator). It is as though Bloy, himself now married to Jeanne Molbech, daughter of a Danish poet, and in a sunnier phase of his own life, were reviving Anne-Marie in order to inquire how she would have fared if she had known men less bitterly uncompromising than himself and if she had had a chance of happiness. At the same time, extreme poverty is still the climate, and there is still a good deal of railing (but in a more detached and satirical vein) against the successful literary figures of the time. Léopold is killed rescuing victims of the great fire at the Opéra Comique, over which, when it occurred in 1887, Bloy had expressed jubilation because so many of the four hundred victims were rich. It was to him a sign of the wrath to come, *"un léger souffle de la respiration de ton Dieu."* God he now saw not only as "The Poor Man" but also as "He who burns," and he records with infinite satisfaction that *"l'asphyxie ou la crémation des bourgeois immondes"* should have supervened upon *"l'abjecte musique de M. Ambroise Thomas."* Clotilde survives and prays, a little like the widow in Mauriac's *Le Baiser au lépreux.*

The opening of the book could have been written by Zola and would have done credit to Céline, Louis Guilloux, or any contemporary *misérabiliste*. It is perhaps the only occasion on which Bloy truly envisages an objective situation, and it makes quite plain that Bloy's comparative failure as a novelist was not due to lack of the specific gift, but simply to obsession and temperamental overcharge.

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We are presented to the crapulous Chapuis, Clotilde's step-father, and to Clotilde's mother. They have had money and lost it. Chapuis drinks and makes advances to his step-daughter, whose mother adores him. Clotilde herself has on one occasion succumbed to a young man's importunities, out of boredom and curiosity. She is now thirty, of pure life, and as deeply possessed of a religious "secret" as the heroine of Bernanos' *La Joie*. Alas, this solidly created atmosphere is quickly dispelled by one of Bloy's obsessions.

Chapuis finds Clotilde work as an artist's model and sends her to the jovial, Rabelaisian Pélopidas Gacougnol who turns out to be a sheep in wolf's clothing. That Clotilde would have disliked undressing in order to pose for an artist is likely enough. Unfortunately, Bloy not only approves of her scruples but maintains them in person with such vehemence that he is reduced in the end to saying that to pose nude is worse than prostitution. This lengthy digression is the book's chief flaw, for it is not even particularly interesting in itself. Omit it, and the story continues to evolve realistically for another twenty or thirty pages. Gacougnol is engaged in an argument when Clotilde arrives. He tells her briefly to undress and continues his argument. When his visitor has gone to the accompaniment of shouting and recrimination, Clotilde is heard sobbing behind the screen. She is on her knees, having removed but one piece of clothing. Gacougnol is at once sympathetic, decides that he can use his model clothed as a Christian martyr in the arena and takes her off to the Jardin des Plantes to sketch lions. Here they meet Marchenoir, and the day peters out in conversation.

There is one more good realistic scene when Clotilde's mother comes round in tears to blackmail Gacougnol, who has bestowed Clotilde in lodgings of her own. From this point, *The Woman Who Was Poor* ceases to be a novel and becomes a *récit* (using the distinction as it is made by Ramon Fernandez) in which the narrative is but a vehicle for the presentation of Bloy's dominant theme, holy and persecuted poverty. Yet having dragged his characters through every kind of accepted misfortune, Bloy concludes by saying in the person of Clotilde, *"Il n'y a qu'une tristesse . . . c'est de* N'ETRE PAS DES *SAINTS,"* and indeed a little earlier Clotilde has said, *"Tout ce qui arrive est adorable."*

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Except for a few months after committing Anne-Marie Roulet to the lunatic asylum, Léon Bloy made communion every day of his adult life: Since there were periods during which he took scarcely any other food, he may be said literally to have lived upon the wafer and the wine which are regarded by Catholics as substantial body and blood of Christ. This is, I believe, regarded as a religious excess. But everything in Bloy is excess. If "exuberance is beauty" and "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom," Bloy should have been, in Blake's sense, a superlative artist and superlatively wise.

It would be fatally easy to regard Bloy from the standpoint of the psychologist. This has in fact been done by Ernest Seillière, who argues that Bloy's whole life and work were an enormous structure of megalomania. Seillière points to the claims made by Bloy to have received (via Anne-Marie) a specific revelation, known only to himself, and to have been marked out for a leading role in the new scheme of salvation, which involved some form of Second Coming. Bloy, according to Seillière, first sought to ally and later to identify himself with God, he and Jesus Christ constituting one embodiment of *le Pauvre*. The answer to this is very simple. It is that despite enormous deprivations, Bloy lived to the age of seventy-one in full possession of his faculties. What looks like persecution mania and what look like delusions of grandeur are not so in the clinical sense. A streak of coprophilia may be detected in Bloy's constant use of images drawn from the privy, but that it did not assume the proportions of a sexual perversion many years of happy marriage indicate.

Bloy had in fact a complete and sustained vision of the world, and it is clearly stated in the two novels which he wrote in his fortieth and fiftieth years. "Complete" is indeed the key-word. Bloy's total imaginative effort was to extend and interlock the two most perfect philosophical structures of the European mind, the horizontal Aristotelian classification of species or great chain of being and the vertical Christian doctrine of the communion of saints, which insists that not only are all living men brothers but that the living, the dead, and the unborn constitute a single community, that the dead can "pray" for the living and the living for the dead or the unborn.

When a coin is given to a beggar with a bad grace, says Bloy

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in *Le Sang du pauvre,* this coin "pierces the poor man's hand, falls, pierces the earth, makes holes in the suns, flies across the firmament, and compromises the universe." In this context Bloy gives to such mysterious interrelatedness of things the name of "reversibility"—*"nom philosophe du grand dogme de la communion des saints."* Clearly it is not philosophy as the academies understand it. Remy de Gourmont's verdict on Bloy was that his book appeared to be the result of a collaboration between St. Thomas Aquinas and Gargantua. At the same time, such asides are not mere rhetorical flourish. Bloy's view of money was entirely consistent. *"L'argent, c'est le sang du pauvre,"* is the key-statement. Money flows through the universe like blood, and the rich man is a cannibal.

But all the profane functions enter into the scheme of redemption. Sex, for instance. The body of any woman is, for Bloy, the body of the Blessed Virgin, a tabernacle of Christ. The body of a woman is, moreover (not "represents" but "is"), the Garden of Eden. This being so, it is clear that prostitution is more than economic misfortune, and marriages of convenience or the social activities of an *allumeuse* cosmic disasters. A somber epithalamion in *The Woman Who Was Poor* describes what happens to the universe when Léopold and Clotilde marry. In the space of a minute, a hundred persons have died and a hundred are born, *"une centaine de vagissements et une centaine de derniers soupirs."* In an hour's time, there are six thousand corpses under the bed. For the joy of lovers must be paid. In order that two people may abstract themselves for a while from the suffering world, the sufferings of the rest of mankind are increased. *"Au moment même où vous bêlerez de volupté,"* through the walls of the marriage-chamber may be heard the weeping and the gnashing of teeth of the man who had no wedding garment and was cast into outer darkness. *"L'Heure qui passe! Voyez-vous ce défilé de soixante Minutes frêles aux talons d'airain dont chacune écrase la terre. . . . "*

An equally remarkable passage in *Salut par les Juifs* describes the effect of the Crucifixion upon the animals during the period when darkness covered the earth. In *La Femme pauvre,* Marchenoir discusses the animals with Clotilde. Marchenoir insists that the animals suffer not only through but for man. Clotilde desires to know whether

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such a belief is concordant with divine justice, since the animals die without hope of salvation. Marchenoir's reply echoes Kant on the *Ding an sich,* though it is improbable that Bloy read Kant.

". . . You would like to know how they are rewarded or paid off. If I knew and could tell you, I should be God, *mademoiselle,* for then I should know what the animals are *in themselves* and no longer, merely, in relation to man. Haven't you noticed we can only perceive beings and things in their relations with other beings and other things, never in their ground and in their essence? There is not a man on earth who can rightly affirm, with full assurance, that any perceptible form is indelible and bears within itself the character of eternity. We are 'sleepers' . . . and the outside world figures in our dreams as 'a riddle in a glass.' We shall not understand this 'world of lamentation' until all hidden things are revealed to us. . . . Till then, we have to accept, with the ignorance of sheep, the sight of universal immolation, telling ourselves that if grief were not shrouded in mystery, it would have neither power nor beauty to enroll martyrs and wouldn't even deserve that the animals should endure it."

At the center of Bloy's "reversible" universe stands the figure of Christ the Poor Man, Christ the scandal of the bourgeoisie. This Christ is a suffering Christ and a Christ who has need of humanity. Such a figure verges on heresy in the West. Angelus Silesius said, "I know that without me God cannot live an instant," and his isolated cry finds numerous echoes in the East, if we are to believe M. Berdyaev. Jehovah was frequently said to be angry. In the West, inquiries into the emotional life of God are discouraged.

The intellectual content of Marchenoir-Bloy's conversion in *Le Désespéré* is uncommon. Two thousand years of the silence of God could not be endlessly protracted. *"Il conclut au conditionnel désespoir des millénaires.* . . . He kneaded a handful of time to make himself an eternity and manufactured his hope from the bitterest pessimism. He persuaded himself that we are dealing with a Lord God emasculate by His own Will, infertile by decree, bound, nailed, perishing in the incrustable reality of His Essence, as He had been, symbolically and visibly, in the bloody adventure of His Hypostasis. He had the intuition of a kind of Divine Impotence, contracted *provisionally* between Mercy and Justice, towards some ineffable

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recuperation of a Substance wasted by Love." It is not the business of a literary critic to assist the Holy Office in smelling out heresies. In the context of this vision and generally in the work of Bloy and his successors, we are, however, confronted with certain specifically literary problems. For all literary creation is myth-making activity, and we may therefore suppose that a practising myth-maker who happens also to owe allegiance to a fixed and embodied mythology is likely to find himself in difficulties.

The moral difficulties of a Catholic novelist have been closely examined by François Mauriac in *Le Roman* (1928) and again in *God and Mammon*. Mauriac's specific difficulties were further analyzed by Charles du Bos in *François Mauriac et le problème du romancier catholique* (1933). It would be interesting to see these three essays studied by some non-Catholic critic. Here let us content ourselves with stating the moral problem of the Catholic novelist in its simplest terms. "Dare he presume to justify himself in rooting out the most unusual sins, to which his professional interest will lead him, when their presentation in a book may scandalize and even corrupt his more simple Catholic reader?" To a non-Christian, this problem appears a little superficial and indeed a little comic (it is possible that a communist would understand it), but one has only to read Mauriac on the problem to see that it really travails him.

Of this kind of scruple, Léon Bloy was apparently incapable. He was, however, greatly affected by a second and more fundamental difficulty, which is only hinted at by Mauriac and du Bos. In *God and Mammon,* Mauriac allows it briefly to be seen that, instead of giving coherence and direction to his work, the faith tends to distract him, to absorb his energies, to fix him in lyrical ecstasy, in the *folie de la Croix*. This conflict was stated already by George Herbert in the seventeenth century.

> Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sun,
> Much less those joys which trample on his head.
>
> As flames do work and wind when they ascend,
> So did I weave myself into the sense.
> But while I bustled, I might hear a friend
> Whisper, "How wide is all this long pretence!
> There is in love a sweetness ready penned:
> Copy out only that, and save expense."

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The truth of the matter is that the creative imagination, dealing with experience according to its own laws, makes discoveries which the praying, the believing soul does not acknowledge. There is a sense in which the creative imagination is repugnant to Christianity and to any fixed and embodied myth. It is a question of time and space, of the dramatic, the dynamic qualities of existence.

By this train of thought we are led back to the considerations with which these notes opened. The literary function of the Catholic faith in the nineteenth century was to provide occasions for blasphemy. But indeed has there ever been a period in which the literary mind stood in any simple and direct relation to the Catholic faith? A number of modern studies suggest that even Dante cultivated a secret doctrine in conflict with the official teaching. Throughout the Christian era, literature and heresy have flourished together, the Provençal poets with the Albigenses, Norman-Celtic romance with the cult of the Sangraal, the Italian renaissance with neo-Platonism and the renaissance elsewhere with the Lutheran and Calvinist reformations. Or, if a poet has not been a heretic, at least he has been a great sinner and rebel, like François Villon and the later succession of *poètes maudits*. Or else he gives way to despair in order to increase the dramatic tension between himself and the vision before which he tends to melt into a lyrical stasis. Dostoevsky had to bury himself in the Siberian mines, with Dmitri Karamazov. In imagination, he had to sink down out of the presence even of the natural light. "And then we men underground will sing from the bowels of the earth a glorious hymn to God, with Whom is joy." Kierkegaard based his theology on despair. The Christian myth is undramatic, like the story of the prodigal son. Within the pattern of Christianity, only sin, despair, and heresy release the imagination.

When a new tradition of absolute faith begins, as it began in France with Bloy, may we not then expect that it will conceal a heresy? All heresies begin with a desire to purify and strengthen the faith.

There is Manichaeism of the ordinary kind in Bloy, the Manichaeism which condemns the natural order as evil in itself. There is also a political Manichaeism which divides the world between the poor and the bourgeoisie. The poor are represented by Christ, Who

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is, quite simply, *le Pauvre*. What demiurge is responsible for the bourgeoisie? Bloy, luckily, does not say. Péguy, who stood in far greater danger of excommunication, was less extreme in this matter. Péguy distinguished clearly between poverty and destitution (*pauvreté* and *misère*) and stated that, while the former is man's normal and blessed state, it is every man's duty to destroy the latter. Bloy makes of destitution-poverty not so much a vocation as a sacrament. Though he did not propose this addition with the bland cynicism which prompted Montherlant to suggest that divorce should be made a sacrament, yet he was looking for the truth in premises long vacated by the faith to which he belonged.

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Nicola Chiaromonte

THE JESUIT

We had been at school together, at the Collegio Massimo, the time-honored Jesuit college where the sons of the Roman middle class sit in the same classroom, but do not mingle, with the scions of the "black" aristocracy. We had been together responsible for a collective act which consisted in greeting the teacher of French with the word "Scythian" whispered by thirty mouths, and, also, for the editing of a mimeographed school magazine, an initiative which was strictly forbidden by the Fathers. We had played soccer and exploded homemade land-mines in the same vacant lot. We had both been in love with Pearl White, and done many irregular and dishonest things for her sake, like selling textbooks and stealing from our fathers' wallets in order not to miss the next episode of *The Mysteries of New York*. But when we were fifteen our roads began to part: Martelli went into the Catholic Youth and embraced the ideology of the Partito Popolare (the pre-Fascist version of the Christian Democrats), while I was for D'Annunzio and (because of D'Annunzio) also for Mussolini. In the meantime, I had also begun to disbelieve in God, and more specially in the necessity of submitting to the torture of weekly confession, while Martelli remained a devout boy and went into retreat every year, to perform Saint Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises under the direction of a very old Father, famous all over Catholic Rome as an outstanding specialist in that kind of devotion. As a consequence, Martelli and I could not be intimate any longer, and in fact we started having different friends. But our ideological quarrels remained a strong bond between us, especially since from politics we had both rushed into theology. It was St. Thomas against Nietzsche (or rather: Zarathustra), and Nietzsche suffered many logical defeats; at the same time Martelli consistently beat me at chess. By

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then, we were not friends any longer, and if I saw him from time to time, it was mainly to test some newly discovered idea or argument against his skillful adherence to tradition. Sometimes, he would suddenly interrupt the argument and, looking me straight in the eye, announce that he was praying for me. To which, what could I answer except "Thank you"? Then, at seventeen, Martelli told me that he was going to become a Jesuit. A year later, he entered the Novitiate.

I did not see him for three years, and when he emerged from his seclusion, he had undergone a weird mutation. There was simply nothing spontaneous about him any more; behind every one of his acts and gestures there was premeditation. It was as if his innermost being had been submitted to an uncannily thorough process of plastic surgery. "Like a dead body, like a cane in the hand of a blind man": the aim starkly set by Ignatius in the chapter *"De Oboedientia"* had been attained in him, too. The adolescent, the young man, the defective human being, had been corrected, straightened, stamped into a fixed shape, made into a dependable spiritual tool. Of Martelli as I had known him, only the outer shell was left, and not even that, since his countenance and gestures had also changed. No other organization, I thought, could get that much from a man, simply because no other organization would care to work on an individual so exhaustively. Certainly not a political party, and certainly not the state either, however totalitarian. The conditioning of youth by the Fascist regime looked silly indeed, when compared to this sort of achievement.

I found myself without any means of communicating with my old playmate, and I was able to talk to him only in distant and vague terms, or else by treating him as the emissary of an evil power, the Church, and getting angry. The rare times we saw each other, I did not know what to do except to be polemical on the subject of the Church prostituting herself to Fascism. He answered that it was a mistake to judge the Church on such trivial grounds, and that, anyway, if he was sorry for some of the things I said, he couldn't help feeling glad that I could get so passionate about Church policies: that was not a sign of indifference, was it? As for Fascism, he didn't like it either, but if the Church could advance her aims a bit because of Mussolini's megalomania, that consoled him for many a sad aspect

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of the situation. The point was that, being a Jesuit, he couldn't become excited about current events any longer: the real battle, the only one about which he could feel passionate, was being fought on a different level. Then Martelli would start talking about modern man drifting away from the Church, and the doctrines that were responsible for it. At that moment I would feel utterly bored and incapable of arguing: the line was too musty, and too preposterous.

Once, I tried to cut my opponent short by reminding him of Flaubert's saying, in 1850, that "our soul is a sealed book to the clergy." That, I said, had been true for some time before 1850, and was an irreparable fact, even if we had to admit that we didn't know what consequences would finally follow from it. "That is what I call drifting," retorted Father Martelli, "You call it freedom, I suppose. To me, this kind of freedom, as Plato will tell you, evokes its opponent, tyranny. If you don't have spiritual order, you are bound to get a police state of some sort, because society *has* to be kept together. The individual might imagine that to follow one's whims and mean well is a sufficient rule of conduct. But society is dogmatic by its very nature. Moreover, to take the only people I know, the Italians—I don't see that their souls are such a sealed book to us priests. It might appear to be so in the cities, because nobody knows what is going on in the cities anyway. But I assure you, in the cities and elsewhere, people keep coming to us, and not just to hear Mass, but to tell us something about their souls and bodies. Not as many as one could desire, I grant, but quite a number.

"We may be wretched soul-readers, but we look after things in the life of the people which nobody else seems to care about. There is no substitute for the parish priest. All is not well with religion today. But the fact is that hardly anyone refuses to have his children baptized, and hardly anyone refuses a religious funeral either. For us that is not enough, but at least it indicates that the Italians are still Catholic. We reject the distinction according to which ritual observance only indicates some kind of vague attachment to tradition, and the idea that, since people do not always follow the Church in politics, they have necessarily parted from her. As long as people will come to us to be married, to have their children baptized, and their dead

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commended to God's mercy, it seems to me that it is your belief that is put in question, and not our faith.

"In other countries, Catholicism may be bolder, or intellectually more refined, but it is in Italy that it is most concrete, that it is deepest in social life. It is in Italy that 'Christian' is synonymous with 'man.' The Church is very much like the family, or the native village, for us Italians: not an idea, but an attachment that cannot be broken, because nobody can get away from his memory. You intellectuals have gotten into the habit of damning your own people for that, saying that Italy is a wretched country because she didn't have a religious reformation, or a social revolution. As for me, I admire God's work in Italy: how lasting, successful, on the whole, Christian Catholicism has been in civilizing the Italians, i.e., in taming the beast in them. If, as you say so often, Fascism is bringing Italy to her ruin, then I am confident that in the hour of trial, between Italy and ruin, there the Church will stand."

I soon learned to listen to Father Martelli without arguing, simply to instruct myself in the Catholic mentality and logic, much as I would read *Civiltà Cattolica,* the Italian Jesuit monthly, or *L'Osservatore Romano*. Outside Italy, intellectuals are inclined to think that modern science, modern philosophy, modern civilization give them the right to be through once and for all with the Catholic question. In Italy, Catholic ambiguity is an ever-present fact. Neither sound logic nor stark political power seem quite to the point in combating it. One discovers Catholic casuistry just below the surface of Croce's neo-Hegelianism, while the space of the afterlife, even when no longer populated by angels and devils, is still an efficient cause of everyday conduct, accounting for much that is inert in Italian life, but also for much that is gentle and humane. As for politics in Italy, the liberal State failed entirely to establish on anything like clear intellectual and juridical grounds the supposedly clear principle of the separation of Church and State. Fascism saw the point. But, even more significant than Fascist appeasement of the Vatican, was the fact that the atheist Mussolini was no sooner in power than he found himself flanked by a spiritual adviser in the person of Father Tacchi-Venturi, S.J., the "Black Eminence."

Confronted with such a state of affairs, a non-Catholic Italian

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is tempted to take a moderately skeptical, and moderately realistic, view of human affairs. But realistic skepticism, especially of the moderate kind, is an essential component of Italian Catholic mentality. Then, since moral and logical laxity seems to characterize Catholicism in Italy, moralistic rigor and sectarianism might seem more pertinent and more efficacious. But rigor and sectarianism require some sort of dogma, and how could a dogma be really anti-Catholic in Italy? When one has received a Catholic education, like me, one is made sensitive to such questions, and the difficulty of finding an answer to them becomes very fascinating. That is why I went to converse with Martelli, and submitted to such seemingly unrewarding exercises as reading Catholic literature and carefully scrutinizing papal Encyclicals. In a way, I was still looking for the politico-intellectual move which would end the intricate game between the Italians and Catholicism with an indisputable checkmate.

I left Italy in 1934, and did not go back until 1947. Meanwhile, I heard regularly from my Jesuit acquaintance at Christmas and Easter, when he would send me good wishes, prayers, and invitations to prayer. I couldn't, in turn, resist the temptation to send him a postcard from Madrid in August, 1936. As for Martelli's personal history, I knew only that the Order had chosen him to be a parish priest rather than a teacher, a scholar, or a publicist. That seemed to me a sign that certain personal qualities I had known and appreciated in him, and more especially a sincere evangelical spirit, the desire to actually serve and help people (if he had not decided to be a priest, I fancied, he would have become a communist), had remained dominant in his character. During the war, I imagined Father Martelli ministering to the poor, organizing relief, giving one of those examples of self-denial that compel admiration and are really what keeps the Church going, postponing time and again the retribution which would otherwise be coming to her, as it comes to other mundane outfits when they lay their bets on the wrong horse (and the Vatican surely had gambled on Fascism with some insistence).

Back in Rome, however, the first news I got about Father Martelli was that he had become an eminent exponent of the trend known as "neo-Fascism." A friend of mine had heard him preach

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one Sunday. The sermon was on the parable of the watchful servants and what follows—how Jesus came to bring fire and discord to earth, not peace (Luke 12:35-43). But the orator had spoken mainly on "authority," and my friend professed to have been truly scared by his ecstatic vehemence. The thesis was that authority is the supreme manifestation of God's will on earth; in inner life as well as in public affairs, Divine Truth reveals itself to man essentially in the form of imperious command; where there is no authority there is no truth; hence, the duty of Catholics in the present time is to pray and work for the restoration of authority, which had been reduced to rubble along with moral, economic, and national life.

Instead of being surprised by the news, I was struck by the fact that such an appeal was bound to sound solemn and inspiring in the Italy of March, 1947. Even when they are patient with him, Italians are basically contemptuous of the priest who falls in with the powers-that-be: he looks superfluous and lackadaisical to them. But a priest who seems to go against the current, and to be free from temporal bondage, will sound apocalyptic, and is sure to find an audience. (One limiting factor, in the case of Father Martelli, was the fact that his church was situated in a middle-class section: Jesuits don't cater to the mob.) And as it happened, the Italians' newly recovered freedom, although enjoyed by everybody including Fascists and Communists, was generally felt to be either precarious or provisional. Moreover, while the word "authority," with its derivatives, was officially taboo, and the fact, authority, practically nonexistent so far as government prestige was concerned, the question of it hung over everybody's mind, and found at best no definite answer.

The striking feature of post-Fascist Italy is how little Italy has changed. To be precise, the Italians have refused to be changed by events. They have refused to become bitter, somber, or niggardly. They have kept up appearances as prescribed by one of the basic unwritten laws of the national behavior, a law which is founded on the general disregard for any clearcut distinction between appearances and reality. There is nothing stoical in the Italians keeping up of appearances, quite the contrary. It means a certain naturalness, an unwillingness to curb normal human habits and incentives. There is no emergency which justifies losing sight of the values

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of everyday life. When such a thing happens, it is really bad. The Germans, the bombings, hunger, the battles, were bad enough. But they were exceptions. The rule: normal life with its normal components, from money-making to daydreaming, is never lost sight of, and couldn't be, since it appears to be one with nature itself. (In fact, to the Italian mind, war and the other man-made catastrophes come not from the human world so much as from the realm of nature: it is natural that, from time to time, man should lose control of events.)

Battles had hardly died down in Central Italy, when young and old men took over, picked up wrecked trucks, tires, screws, and nails, any piece of thing that could imaginably be put to use. During the last weeks of the siege of Rome, while the city was actually starving, in the poor sections people were feverishly busy repairing and improvising all kinds of contraptions for the expected black market boom: only American supplies were needed to round off the job. One of the leaders of the resistance in the North tells, quite incidentally, in his memoirs how he took a few days off from the struggle to go to Trieste to pick up his family and take them back to Milan, where he had found an apartment: apartments were awfully scarce. And family life surely has a priority in Italy. In the same book, the reader is told that at one moment the commander in chief of the resistance, Parri himself, grimly announced to the assembled Committee of National Liberation that in case his wife were arrested he would give himself up to the Germans. Hence from then on, the fate of the resistance movement was dependent on, among other things, Parri's family. The decision, Parri had added, was the outcome of an agonizing moral struggle. Which was certainly true, but it also meant that in Italy not even the conditions created by the Nazis could persuade a man, who otherwise accepted their challenge, to make his commitment unconditional. Italy is no place for categorical imperatives.

While doing something, an Italian always keeps an eye on something else: sometimes it is a sentiment, sometimes a dream, often a strictly personal interest. This makes people say that Italians are realists. To be sure, Italians are a practical people, even if not exactly pragmatic, or dedicated to efficiency. But they are realists also in another, more maddening, sense. Their view of things can be desperately trite, tied

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down not to facts so much as to details and details of details. They care infinitely about the tangible world. One should not forget the sense in which Leonardo and Galileo can be called realists, and which also is Italian. In any case, the most lonely Italian is certainly the "idealist," the man who is seized by one idea and carried away by it, heedless of consequences, because he wants a real "change."

Italy has not changed. The rich have become richer; the poor, poorer. The pitiless law according to which it is natural that those who are at the bottom should be miserable and good, and those who are on top satisfied and wicked, still dominates Italian life. In the collapse of Fascism, only Fascism has been refuted. Fascist authority and state structure are not there any longer. But, if the façade has crumbled, everything that was behind the façade before is still there, very much the same. Except that everything looks like the scattered fragments of a scattered society. Everything is in a state of suspension: conservatism together with the need for change; authoritarian habits along with libertarian impulses; nationalism and the natural cosmopolitanism of the Italians. Political freedom, as it exists today in Italy, *is* a state of suspension. But still it makes a difference. The simple fact of free speech has given the country an animation which looks like a new life. Misfortune has made the Italians feel united as they never felt before. The country is far from inert.

Yet the apparent immutability of Italian society weighs everybody down. On the large-scale level of politics, everything that has happened could have been predicted by the most commonplace imagination: the strength of the Communists, the dominating role of the Catholics, the practical inexistence of the "liberals." In fact, anybody who has tried to concoct something new in Italian politics has finally come to grief: the intellectuals of the Action Party, who thought they had to offer a new synthesis of liberalism and socialism; and the demagogues of the Common Man Front, who tried a peculiar mixture of the old fashioned and the colloquial.

It is true that the war and foreign occupation left the Italians with a limited, and somewhat prearranged, number of choices. It is even truer that Italy, like all Europe, has been thrown on a rock bottom of hard facts. Against hard facts, as everybody knows,

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clever formulas are of no avail, though it is felt for some reason that traditional patterns (or vested interests) help. The new realistic school is triumphant. Except that in Italy realism is no news: it always meant cynicism. And a strong man at the top.

The point in today's political realism is that it turns political life into a question of mass inertia, not of change. Realpolitik necessarily feeds on mass habits and imbedded traditions, not on new ideas and spontaneous surges. In fact, its effort must be continuously directed toward mobilizing the first and suppressing the second. It must consistently follow the logical pattern of the movie producer who maintains that bad movies are made by the public, not by him. To the Realpolitiker, the issue as it comes up or exists in social life is never *primary; what is essential is what was there before: the vested* interests, the reliable inertia of habits. The monarchy should be abolished, but to start with we must compromise with the monarchists; self-government is the goal, but bureaucratic tradition is a fact: we must let bureaucracy have its way until further notice; we want the Church curbed, but it is imperative that we don't alienate the churchgoers, hence let's give the Church what she wants *now*. In Italy, these arguments have all been employed by the Communists at one moment or other.

But the kind of reasoning such arguments represent is by no means the monopoly of the Communists. When Togliatti arrived from Moscow, in 1944, to become a Minister of the King, it was not only a temporary deal he brought with him: he was bringing back to Italy the Golden Rule of Italian politics, which had been shaken by events. The fighting, Allied rule, and the "cold war" did the rest. Today, the Italian ruling class is thoroughly alive to the necessity of being "realistic." (Togliatti is universally regarded as a political genius. Until recently, conservatives were likely to tell you that he could become "a second Giolitti," an admirable liberal-conservative statesman that is, if only he wanted to. It so happened that Togliatti wanted them to believe precisely that.)

The result is that if one excludes the adventure of Communist conquest, the Italians, after a disaster that has completely changed the terms of their national problems, are being shown by their leaders only one clear path, the path that leads back to the traditional ways

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of their society. The most recent tradition is, of course, Fascism. It is not by chance that the Communists are diligently following the blueprint of Fascist conquest: armed squads, punitive expeditions, etc. There are no two ways of doing the same thing, and why bother to invent new methods anyway? Aside from that, there is the fact that nobody seems to know exactly how to avoid going back to the fundamental propositions of Fascism: state authority, state corporatism, and nationalism as a cement. Very few people are Fascists, of course, and everybody wants caution above all: the dangers are too many.

And what institution can, in Italy, give a better guaranty of caution than the Church, the locus of all tradition, and of all prudence? If Italy goes authoritarian, the Church will palliate authoritarian harshness, as she did under Fascism. If democracy wins, she will see to it that it is accompanied by the right dose of authority. In Italy, the Church offers not heaven so much as protection from the sheer impact of history. And she has recently acted quite effectively as an intermediary between the defeated nation and the great of this world. Italians are indeed bound to feel protected by her.

In this respect at least, Father Martelli had been right. I went to see him in his church. It is a horror of a church, built in a kind of streamlined Romanesque style which is the religious equivalent of the somber emptiness of Fascist official architecture: a parallelepiped of bricks laid flatly on the ground and flanked by another parallelepiped of the same material, but standing up, as it has to represent the church tower. The heart of the malicious infidel cannot help rejoicing at such a prodigy of structural insincerity. Martelli's office, however, was a plain whitewashed room, mostly empty, showing all the signs of exemplary Jesuit parsimony. There was the same implacable dreariness I had known in college. Martelli had by no means tried to make his bourgeois parishioners feel at ease in there.

Of the things I had imagined about him from afar, one proved to be right. Namely, he had clearly worn himself out with work. Outwardly he looked healthy and strong. But in walking he had to help himself with a cane, and he advanced at a slow and heavy pace, as if he were repressing a hidden pain or making a great effort at every step. There was effort in his speech, too. His shiny cassock was mended in more than one place. He wore thick-soled boots, battered

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but well polished. When I arrived, he was counting small notes and ranging them in bundles in a basket. "The alms." he said. "They are meager."

One of the first things he told me was that he wished he knew more about American democracy. The question was not quite clear to him. He had been told that for the Americans democracy finally rests on education. But what was the basis of education then? How could there be education without a supreme truth binding together the teacher, the pupil, and the society in which they lived?

"I don't know about America," he went on. "But I do know about the kind of democracy we are supposed to have over here. It's an imposture: the lie you have to tell in order to succeed. The biggest lie of all is Christian Democracy, a contradiction in terms. At the opposite end, there are the Communists. The Communists are pursuing their own anti-Christian aim; but they do have a notion of authority. It is quite normal that they should exploit confusion in order to get Evil. You cannot say that they are lying. It is their faith itself which is imposture, the Error of our time. The other parties, however, are pitiful. For most of them, the lie they call 'democracy' is just a way of groping. Through confusion on to more confusion. In between lies this hapless country, 'a vessel without pilot in a mighty storm.' "

I told him that his bitterness was surprising to me. I should have thought that a Catholic would feel rather hopeful in Italy. The Church had never, for the last eighty years, been so politically and economically strong. And the Christian Democrats might prove a useful expedient after all. Why object to them on the grounds of logic?

He had a tired smile:

"Diplomacy. I know, I know. The trouble is that it is not an adequate answer. Diplomacy might be necessary in high places, but you can't give diplomatic answers to people who come to you for advice and comfort. You have to take chances, and open your heart to them. The people are distressed. They find it more and more difficult to be Christians in a society which becomes less and less Christian every day. They are the prey of economic and political anxiety. They want to know what to do *now*. It is only by giving them

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straight answers that you can retain their confidence."

"And what is your answer?" I asked.

"They must have told you that I am a Fascist," he said with a boyish giggle. "Of course I am not. I am a Jesuit. Moreover, the only restoration I care for, is the restoration of society to Christ. But, if we want to be serious and not just cry wolf after the wolf is dead, as people are doing today, we have to recognize that Fascism, insofar as it realized that the social problem is first of all a problem of authority, and that there can be no authority without Catholicism, was a step in the right direction, and a most important one at that. The trouble was that, like so many Italians, Mussolini was an amateur. He thought it possible for a political leader of our time to be a Catholic only up to a certain point. In this he was no better than so many liberal politicians. Italy is now paying for his mistake. But the fact is, that if Fascism has been defeated, it has by no means been proved wrong. We knew that the moment we became a conquered people. If I were a cardinal I would be prudent. But I am a parish priest, and what can I, in all conscience, tell people who come to me for advice, except that the principle which was beginning to give the Italian nation a true Catholic shape must not be given up? What comforts me is that the younger generation seems to be aware of this duty."

All this was asserted with passion, as if it were an absolutely personal belief. But it wasn't. In fact, another Jesuit, Father Lombardi, the most popular orator in Italy after Togliatti, was saying very much the same thing, in public places as well as over the radio. He introduced himself at the radio with the words: "Jesus is at the microphone. Jesus wants to speak to you. Listen to Jesus" (the cover of the volume in which his radio talks have been collected bears a reproduction of the head of Christ from Raphael's "Transfiguration" with the addition of a neatly drawn microphone in the right corner). As for Father Lombardi's political message, it was quite straight. He tried to give heart to the distressed Italians by pointing out that "a newly reorganized life might be better than the one we have been *forced to renounce*." Italy, he said, still has the greatest possessions of all, Rome and the Pope. Italy's greatest glories have all been Christian and Catholic. The nation can be reborn in spite of the

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"shameful peace treaty" imposed on her by "the cowardice of the conquerors." Italy has a right to have her colonies back, and, also, to have a new army, whose young soldiers "can again confidently sing the motherland's songs." If the Italians stick by their "two mothers, the Motherland and the Church," there can be no doubt about "the final triumph." In his final talk, the speaker was troubled by the query whether "the devil will not unleash a battle in order to prevent Italy's rebirth in Christ . . . and spill new blood over our soil." "That blood," the Father reassuringly answered himself, "if it should be spilled, will spell doom for the men who have committed the crime. And from that blood Italy will be reborn, more beautiful than ever."

I told Martelli that his remarks reminded me of what Father Lombardi had been preaching. The general idea seemed to be National Catholicism, or was I wrong?

"I can see the logic of it," I said, "but I don't see how your notion of authority can be made to work. If what you have in mind is straight theocracy, then allow me to say that in my opinion it hasn't got a chance. Granted that the Italians are by and large still Catholics, you must admit that their Catholicism is of such a kind that it excludes precisely the notion that the Church should become an absolute power. And you are not thinking of a new adventure in dictatorship, are you?"

"You have been away a long time," he answered, "Apparently you have remained more of an optimist than I have. You still think in terms of intellectual alternatives. But, my dear friend, there are no alternatives. Would to God that theocracy, as you call it, were today an actual choice. It would mean that society had remained essentially Christian. Harmony between religion and politics would then still be the generally accepted norm, and it could always be achieved through some kind of wise adjustment. Unfortunately, we don't live in the thirteenth century. We live in a time which is the negation of any harmony. If you were a priest, you would know to what a horrible extent the moral life of the individual is constantly yielding ground under the pressure of social disorder. Christian restoration today means Christian reconquest of society. The only question is 'where should we start from?' If by dictatorship you mean emergency power, I can only answer that the present situation is indeed

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one of dire emergency. There is no other point from which to start except an act of authority."

I left, and found myself back in the Roman streets and squares: the Roman space, so generous, so free of compulsion, rejecting nothing, asking nothing of the individual, except that he pick up a disguise and play a role, forgetting himself in it. The cast is innumerable, the stage set once and for all. There is room for the Fanatic on it, and for the Cynic. Only the real person is excluded: the heretic. Or isn't he?

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James Johnson Sweeney

JOAN MIRÓ: COMMENT AND INTERVIEW

Fernand Léger, the French cubist, tells of meeting Henri Rousseau, *le douanier,* at the *vernissage* of an official Salon in Paris a year or so before the older man's death. They happened to be in a room with a group of pictures by the academician Bouguereau. Léger was uninterested; Rousseau was enthusiastic—"But, Monsieur, look at the wonderful technique. See the little highlights on the fingernails!"

It was the virtuosity of the academician that impressed Rousseau. He was a sensitive and careful technician himself. His essential naïvete lay in his failure to realize the futility of academic ostentation in comparison with his own gifts. Actually he was painting in their manner, more than they could ever appreciate—more than would ever appear from a superficial comparison of the work of both. For the academician had set out to seek exactly what Rousseau was finding. The academician's premises were sound: a scrupulous compositional structure, an integrity of line, and a cleanness of workmanship. It was a weakness for ostentation, for exhibitionism, that spoiled the product. Rousseau's personal simplicity and directness were his strength. His intensity of focus on his objective, the picture, would not permit him to be led aside by alien interests—display, easy effects, or worldly success. He could not see beyond the picture itself any more than a Piet Mondrian could. He lived in his painting and for his painting. He put all his ability and sensibility into his work to that end. This was his naïvete.

But since the recognition accorded Rousseau as an artist, a plague of "naive" painting has spread over Europe and America. Every country, district—almost every art gallery has its own so-called "primitive": his work justified by a proclaimed resemblance to that of Rousseau. The basis for the claim is either a total misunderstanding of Rousseau's art, or a willing blindness to the difference between it and the other. Such "primitives" are usually "Sunday painters" as Rousseau was forced to be. "In view of the lack of fortune on the part of his parents," he ex-

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plained in a biographical paragraph which he composed for a directory of painters and sculptors, "he was obliged at first to follow another career than that to which his artistic tastes called him." But in most cases, the paintings of these "naives," unlike those of Rousseau, fail through their limited technical competence to express the artists' innate sensibility. Their work, therefore, is closer to children's than to Rousseau's. It may be superficially amusing, or delightful for the moment, but it has no durable quality.

A picture by Rousseau, on the other hand, suffers no more from a lack of technical competence in expression than a painting of the School of Avignon, or an African Negro sculpture. Its primitivism lies rather in the primary character of its appeal—its unadorned immediacy —its appeal to the *primitif visuel,* or the child in the grown-up. And in this sense the terms "primitivism" and "naïvete" meet. For naïvete in art is directness and simplicity in contrast to the sophistication of pretending to do one thing while doing another. Incompetence has no place.

And in the light of these two principal characteristics of Rousseau's work, it is not the so-called "primitives," or "Sunday painters" who are his equivalents in our period. It is more properly Joan Miró. For in Miró, both personally and in his work, we find a "primitivism" similar to that of Rousseau, quite apart from any lack of competence—a single-minded attempt to effect primary appeals with an intensity of focus that never allows him to deviate from his objective. We also recognize a naïvete in the fact that he is carried away by the striking effects achieved by the literary and sophisticated approach of the surrealists, so often basically plastic; but Miró, again like Rousseau, makes use only of what is pictorially valuable beneath the sophistication which attracts him and is never misled into fields of exhibitionism, or distracted from the picture itself.

The true approach, therefore, to Miró's art is not to something esoteric, but to something in our age as naive—as simply pictorial and lyrical—as Rousseau's was in his time. The only difference (a necessary one in the case of two true artists) is that Miró paints his lyrics in the idiom of the twentieth century while Rousseau painted his in that of the nineteenth century. The same respect for craft is there, the same love of artisanry, the same single-mindedness, peasant practicality, and realism (Rousseau described himself in his biographical note as *"un de nos meilleurs peintres realistes"*), and the same absence of a sense of humor regarding his own work (despite its gaiety throughout): all this marked by the deep impression made upon him in the early twenties by the sur-

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realist devices to produce, out of the unconscious, their "little highlights on the fingernails."

Miró:*

"For me a form is never something abstract; it is always a sign of something. It is always a man, a bird, or something else. For me painting is never form for form's sake.

"In my early years I was an extreme realist. I worked constantly at realistic painting up to 'The Farm.' Even that painting which I made in Paris to keep me in touch with Montroig was so dependent on reality I used to go out to the Bois de Boulogne to pick twigs and leaves to use as models for the plants and foliage in the foreground. The picture represents all that was closest to me at home, even the footprints on the path by the house. It was Montroig in Paris. I am very much attached to the landscape of my country. That picture made it live for me.

"Besides this, 'The Farm' is a synthesis of much that went before. I had always admired the primitive Catalan church-paintings and the gothic retables. An essential factor in my work has always been my need of self-discipline. A picture had to be right to a millimeter—had to be in balance to a millimeter. For example in painting 'The Farmer's Wife,' I found that I had made the cat too large: it threw the picture out of balance. This is the reason for the double circles and the two angular lines in the foreground. They look symbolic, esoteric: but they are no fantasy. They were put in to bring the picture into equilibrium. And it was this same need that had forced me the year before to sacrifice reality to some degree in 'The Farm': the smooth wall had to have the cracks to balance the wire of the chicken coop on the other side of the picture. It was this need for discipline which forced me to simplify in painting things from nature just as the Catalan primitives did.

"Then there was the discipline of cubism. I learned the structure of a picture from cubism. . . .

"And there was the influence of two early teachers: Urgell and Pasco. Urgell's was very important. Even today I recognize forms constantly appearing in my work that originally impressed me in his painting, though it is true Urgell was a romantic follower of Böcklin and saw

* The following remarks do not pretend to be verbatim, but are based on several formal and informal discussions with the artist.—Author's note.

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things in a sad light while these forms in my work always take a gay character.

"I remember two paintings of Urgell in particular, both characterized by long, straight, twilit horizons which cut the pictures in halves: one a painting of a moon above a cypress tree, another with a crescent moon low in the sky. Three forms which have become obsessions with me represent the imprint of Urgell: a red circle, the moon, and a star. They keep coming back, each time slightly different. But for me it is always a story of recovering: one does not discover in life. . . .

"Another recurrent form in my work is the ladder. In the first years it was a plastic form frequently appearing because it was so close to me—a familiar shape in 'The Farm.' In later years, particularly during the war, while I was on Majorca, it came to symbolize 'escape': an essentially plastic form at first—it became poetic later. Or plastic, first; then nostalgic at the time of painting 'The Farm'; finally, symbolic.

"Pasco was the other teacher whose influence I still feel. He was extremely liberal and encouraged me to take every liberty in my work. Color was easy for me. But with form I had great difficulty. Pasco taught me to draw from the sense of touch by giving me objects which I was not allowed to look at, but which I was afterwards made to draw. Even today, thirty years after, the effect of this touch-drawing experience returns in my interest in sculpture: the need to mold with my hands—to pick up a ball of wet clay like a child and squeeze it. From this I get a physical satisfaction that I cannot get from drawing or painting. . . .

"At the time I was painting 'The Farm,' my first year in Paris, I had Gargallo's studio. Masson was in the studio next door. Masson was always a great reader and full of ideas. Among his friends were practically all the young poets of the day. Through Masson I met them. Through them I heard poetry discussed. The poets Masson introduced me to interested me more than the painters I had met in Paris. I was carried away by the new ideas they brought and especially the poetry they discussed. I gorged myself on it all night long—poetry principally in the tradition of Jarry's *Surmâle*. . . .

"As a result of this reading I began gradually to work away from the realism I had practiced up to 'The Farm,' until, in 1925, I was drawing almost entirely from hallucinations. At the time I was living on a few dried figs a day. I was too proud to ask my colleagues for help. Hunger was a great source of these hallucinations. I would sit for long periods looking at the bare walls of my studio trying to capture these shapes on paper or burlap.

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"Little by little I turned from dependence on hallucinations to forms suggested by physical elements, but still quite apart from realism. In 1933, for example, I used to tear newspapers into rough shapes and paste them on cardboards. Day after day I would accumulate such shapes. After the collages were finished they served me as points of departure for paintings. I did not copy the collages. I merely let them suggest shapes to me. . . .

"Between the years 1938 and 1940 I once again became interested in realism. Perhaps the interest began as early as 1937 in 'Still Life With Old Shoe.' Perhaps the events of the day, particularly the drama of the war in Spain, made me feel that I ought to soak myself in reality. I used to go every day to the Grande Chaumière to work from a model. At the time I felt a need to control things by reality.

"This realistic discipline gave me the strength to take a fresh stride—much as the discipline of cubism had given me the courage earlier. . . .

"At Varengeville-sur-Mer, in 1939, began a new stage in my work which had its source in music and nature. It was about the time that the war broke out. I felt a deep desire to escape. I closed myself within myself purposely. The night, music, and the stars began to play a major role in suggesting my paintings. Music had always appealed to me, and now music in this period began to take the role poetry had played in the early twenties—especially Bach and Mozart when I went back to Majorca upon the fall of France.

"Also the material of my painting began to take a new importance. In water colors I would roughen the surface of the paper by rubbing it. Painting over this roughened surface produced curious chance shapes. Perhaps my self-imposed isolation from my colleagues led me to turn for suggestions to the materials of my art. First to the rough surfaces of the heavy burlap series of 1939; then to ceramics—

"Nowadays I rarely start a picture from an hallucination as I did in the twenties, or, as later, from collages. What is most interesting to me today is the material I am working with. It supplies the shock which suggests the form just as cracks in a wall suggested shapes to Leonardo.

"For this reason I always work on several canvases at once. I start a canvas without a thought of what it may eventually become. I put it aside after the first fire has abated. I may not look at it again for months. Then I take it out and work at it coldly like an artisan, guided

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strictly by rules of composition after the first shock of suggestion has cooled.

"—Then after the heavy burlap series of 1939 I began a group of gouaches which were shown here in New York at the Pierre Matisse Gallery just after the war—an entirely new conception of things. I did about five or six of them before I left Varengeville for Spain and Majorca at the fall of France. There were twenty-two in all in the series. They were based on reflections in water. Not naturalistically—or objectively—to be sure. But forms suggested by such reflections. In them my main aim was to achieve a compositional balance. It was a very long and extremely arduous work. I would set out with no preconceived idea. A few forms suggested here would call for other forms elsewhere to balance them. These in turn demanded others. It seemed interminable. It took a month at least to produce each water color, as I would take it up day after day to paint in other tiny spots, stars, washes, infinitesimal dots of color in order finally to achieve a full and complex equilibrium.

"As I lived on the outskirts of Palma I used to spend hours looking at the sea. Poetry and music both were now all-important to me in my isolation. After lunch each day I would go to the cathedral to listen to the organ rehearsal. I would sit there in that empty gothic interior daydreaming, conjuring up forms. The light poured into the gloom through the stained-glass windows in an orange flame. The cathedral seemed always empty at those hours. The organ music and the light filtering through the stained-glass windows to the interior gloom suggested forms to me. I saw practically no one all those months. But I was enormously enriched during this period of solitude. I read all the time: St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, and poetry—Mallarmé, Rimbaud. It was an ascetic existence: only work.

"After having finished this series of paintings in Palma, I moved to Barcelona. And as these Palma paintings had been so exacting both technically and physically I now felt the need to work more freely, more gaily—to 'proliferate.'

"I produced a great deal at this time, working very quickly. And just as I worked very carefully in the Palma series which had immediately preceded these, 'controlling' everything, now I worked with the least control possible—at any rate in the first phase, the drawing. Gouaches: in pastel colors, with very violent contrasts. Even here, however, only the broad outlines were unconsciously done. The rest was carefully calculated. The broad initial drawing, generally in grease crayon, served

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as a point of departure. I even used some spilled blackberry jam in one case as a beginning; I drew carefully around the stains and made them the center of the composition. The slightest thing served me as a jumping off place in this period.

"And in the various paintings I have done since my return from Palma to Barcelona there have always been these three stages—first, the suggestion, usually from the material; second, the conscious organization of these forms; and third, the compositional enrichment.

"Forms take reality for me as I work. In other words, rather than setting out to paint something, I begin painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush. The form becomes a sign for a woman or a bird as I work.

"Even a few casual wipes of my brush in cleaning it may suggest the beginning of a picture. The second stage, however, is carefully calculated. The first stage is free, unconscious; but after that the picture is controlled throughout, in keeping with that desire for disciplined work I have felt from the beginning. The Catalan character is not like that of Malaga or other parts of Spain. It is very much down-to-earth. We Catalans believe you must always plant your feet firmly on the ground if you want to be able to jump up in the air. The fact that I come down to earth from time to time makes it possible for me to jump all the higher."

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William Carlos Williams

FROM "PATERSON: BOOK II"

I

Signs everywhere of birds nesting, while
in the air, slow, a crow zigzags
with heavy wings before the wasp-thrusts
of smaller birds circling about him

Walking:—
he leaves the path, finds hard going
across field, stubble and matted brambles
seeming a pasture—but no pasture .
—old furrows, to say labor sweated or
had sweated here .
a flame,
spent.

The file-sharp grass .
When! from before his feet, half tripping,
picking a way, there starts .
a flight of empurpled wings!
—invisibly created (their
jackets dust-gray) from the dust kindled
to sudden ardor!

They fly away, churring! until
their strength spent they plunge
to the coarse cover again and disappear
—but leave, livening the mind, a flashing
of wings and a churring song .

AND a grasshopper of red basalt, boot-long,
tumbles from the core of his mind,
a rubble-bank disintegrating beneath a
tropic downpour

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—a matte stone solicitously instructed
to bear away some rumor
of the living presence that has preceded
it, out-precedented its breath .

These wings do not unfold for flight—
no need!
The weight (to the hand) finding
a counterweight or counter buoyancy
of the mind's wings .

Walking:—
He is afraid! What then?

Before his feet, at each step, the flight
is renewed. A burst of wings, a quick
churring sound :

couriers to the ceremonial of love!

—aflame in flight!
—aflame only in flight!
No flesh but the caress!

He is led forward by their announcing wings.

II

The descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned
Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
a sort of renewal
even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
places
inhabited by hordes
heretofore unrealized,

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of new kinds—
since their movements
are toward new objectives
(even though formerly they were abandoned)

No defeat is made up entirely of defeat—since
the world it opens is always a place
formerly
unsuspected. A
world lost,
a world unsuspected
beckons to new places
and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory
of whiteness .

With evening, love wakens
though its shadows
which are alive by reason
of the sun shining—
grow sleepy now and drop away
from desire .

Love without shadows stirs now
beginning to waken
as night
advances.

The descent
made up of despairs
and without accomplishment
realizes a new awakening :
which is a reversal
of despair.

For what we cannot accomplish, what
is denied to love,

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what we have lost in the anticipation—
a descent follows,
endless and indestructible .

III

On this most voluptuous night of the year
the term of the moon is yellow with no light
the air's soft, the night bird has
only one note, the cherry tree in bloom

makes a blurr on the woods, its perfume,
no more than half guessed, moves in the mind.
No insect is yet awake, leaves are few.
In the arching trees there is no sleep.

The blood is still and indifferent, the face
does not ache nor sweat soil nor the
mouth thirst. Now love might enjoy its play
and nothing disturb the slow octave of its run.

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SPANISH LETTER

The police come first to your notice in Spain, taking precedence over the people, the streets, and the landscape: the Guardia Civil in their wooden-looking, shiny, circular hats, brims flattened at the back, hats which are real enough, since they are worn and seen but, unlike the tommy-gun which each Guardia has in the crook of his arm, lacking in *real* reality. Next, gray-uniformed police with the red eagle on their sleeves and rifles hanging on their backs. Even the guard in the park, an old man in the costume of a Swiss Chasseur with a draggled feather, leather jerkin, and shabby leggings, holds a rifle by the strap. Then there are the secret police; no one knows how many kinds there are but you see a great deal of them. On the Irún-Madrid express our passports were examined by one who swung into the compartment and reversed his lapel, showing us the badge of blue, gold, and red enamel. He was quiet, equable, and unsystematic, sighing while he wrote some of the passport numbers into his notebook and ruffling the pages as if wondering what to do next with his authority. He murmured adios and withdrew. The train labored on toward the flower-blazing villas of Santander, the wooden walls of the car quivering. The seats were long and seignorial, each headrest covered with lace, and in one of them sat a Spaniard who, as we were passing the harbor, engaged us in conversation, not casually, by design, preventing me from looking at the ships in the silver, coal-streaked, evening water. He gave us a lecture on the modernity of Santander and invited us to ask questions on Spanish life, Spanish history, geography, industry, or character and, without being asked, wrinkling his narrow forehead and shooting forward his palms like a photographer ordering you to hold still, he began to speak of hydroelectric power, very minute in his details about turbines, wiring, transmitters, and whatnot. We were American and therefore interested in mechanical subjects. I was not an engineer, I told him. Nevertheless he finished his speech and sat as if waiting for me to pro-

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pose a subject closer to my interests. He was a small, nervously mobile, brown man with measuring, aggressive, melancholy eyes. He wore a gloomy brown gabardine suit, shiny with dirt, and shoes that were laced through only half the eyelets. Already we were climbing through the thickening darkness; farms appeared below, remote in the steep, green valleys. "You are on a holiday?" he said. "You will see many beautiful things." He enumerated them: the Escorial, the Prado, the Alhambra, Sevilla, Cadiz, *la taza de plata.* He had seen them all; he had been everywhere; he had fought everywhere. "In Spain?" I asked. In Spain, of course, and in Russia and Poland as a member of the Blue Division against the Reds. Essentially he was a soldier; he came of a military family; his father was a high-ranking officer, a colonel in the air-force. He threw his hand open to me, displaying a white scar in the palm—his souvenir of Albacete. Just then a young Guardia, lanky and sunburned, began to roll back the refractory door, and he sprang from his place, seized the handle and held it. He spoke a few rapid words in an undertone to the Guardia and rattled the door shut. Someone, certainly not one of the Spaniards in the compartment, said, *"Hay sitio."* There was room enough for two more passengers. But the colonel's son kept his own counsel and, stepping over legs to his own seat, he resumed his conversation—with me alone this time, confidentially; and for a while something of the expression with which he had dismissed the Guardia lingered on his face, the roused power of his office. Yes, he belonged to the police and made three trips a week between Irún and Madrid. He liked the job. Being an old campaigner, he did not mind the jolting or the noise—there was singing accompanied by rhythmical clapping and stamping in the next compartment; in his own time, he put a stop to that. The pay was not enough for his style of life, but he was expecting a good *enchufe,* or sinecure, to which he felt himself entitled. Fortunately he could add to his income by writing. He wrote fiction and at present he was busy with a long historical novel in verse. His eyes grew hot and visionary as he began to talk of the poets he admired and to quote, somber and reverent. I reflected that it was probably appropriate, since so many European writers were ambitious to become policemen, that the police should aspire to become writers.

Meanwhile the sky had grown dark and the train threaded its weak light among the trees and rocks or stopped briefly at stations as weakly lighted as itself. Crowds waited in the mist and the passage was filling. No one made a persistent effort to get into the compartment; everyone was turned away by the colonel's son. We, the Americans,

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were in his charge and he was determined that we should have a comfortable night, with space enough to stretch out and sleep. But somehow, by pressure of numbers, the vacant places were filled and, sensing our disapproval of such a thing, he did not try to evict the new occupants. He continued to be as solicitous as before. When I broke off a piece of the loaf I had bought in Hendaye he was horrified to see me eat such inferior bread. I must have a slice of his tortilla. He dragged down his valise, touched the lock, and it sprang open. The tortilla was in a round tin box. Under it lay copies of *Green Hornet, Coyote,* and other pulp magazines. He cut a thick, gray slice of the cake. I ate what I could of it, excused myself from finishing and went into the corridor. Most of the people there were traveling between local stations, a crowd of *gente humilde,* sad, shabby, and world-worn, resting between the walls, leaning on the brass rods along the windows, with gloom-deepened eyes and black nostrils; in muffling shawls or berets that flattened their heads and made a disproportion in their long, brown faces; melancholy, but with a kind of resistance to dreariness, as if ready to succumb so far but no farther to it—the Spanish *dignidad.*

The passengers in the neighboring compartment had become very boisterous, and now the colonel's son came out and subdued them. I returned to my seat and he to his. Immediately he opened a new topic. Tired of his conversation and of humoring him, I refused to respond and at last he was silent. Then the shades were drawn, someone turned off the light, and we tried to sleep.

By morning the passage was bare, swept clean. The colonel's son said, "We will pass the Escorial soon, where the tombs of the kings are." I was stony to him. We were running downslope in a rush of smoke. The shallow fields, extending on either side to the mountains, looked drought-stricken, burnt, desert, mere stubble and dust. We burst into the suburbs of Madrid and into the yards. On the platform the colonel's son was at my back and in the sooty arcades and the hell's-antechamber turmoil of the station he hung on, rueful and anxious at my speed. Presumably he had to know where I was staying in Madrid to complete his mission. From the hotel bus I saw his brown face in the spectator throng of porters, cabbies, and touts for hotels and *pensiones,* watching the baggage being lifted to the roof, hot-eyed, avoiding my glance, and looking on at the work. Successful!

First and last, the police. In every hotel there are police forms to fill and passports have to be registered at the station. To obtain a railroad ticket you must make out a statement stating the object

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of the journey and you cannot travel without a *triptico,* a safe-conduct. No consulate or embassy is permitted to grant a visa without the police *salida.* The broad face of *Seguridad,* near the place where the first shots were fired on Napoleon's troops, dominates the Puerta del Sol with barred and darkened windows. The police license radios. The police go through your suitcase in a provincial rooming-house. The woman living in the cave, dug in the bluff near the Manzanares, is quick to tell you, "We are here with the permission of the *policía.*" Everywhere you hear that the jails are full. There is regular bus service for visitors from Cibeles, at the center of town, to the Carabanchel prison. On a trolley car near the Toledo Gate, I saw two arrestees, an old man and a boy of about eighteen, being taken there. They were handcuffed and in the custody of a pair of Guardia with the inevitable machine guns. The boy, with thick hair that grew sturdily down his neck and with prematurely deep creases beneath his eyes, had the precarious nonchalance of deep misery and deep hatred. There was a loaf of bread sticking out of his pocket. The old man was one-armed, filthy, and scarred. His feet were coming through the rope-soled *alpargatas.* He was nearly bald and the lines of a healed wound spread under his thin gray hair. I looked at him and he gave me a gentle shrug of surrender, not daring to speak, but when I got down in Mataderos, among buildings demolished during the civil war, he ventured to lift his hand and wave it as far as the steel cuff permitted.

These were probably common criminals, not "*Rojos.*" Hundreds of the latter are arrested every month and the trials at Alcalá de Henares continue endlessly. Political prisoners released from the overflowing jails are on conditional liberty and show you the cards on which they must have a current official stamp. Most of them are not granted work-permits and live as they can in the streets, shining shoes, opening taxi doors, peddling lottery tickets, and begging.

At the center of Madrid you occasionally notice shot-scarred buildings, but on the whole there are few reminders of the civil war in the better *barrios.* On Gran Via the shops are almost American in their luxury, and the early evening café crowds that sit looking down the broad curve of the street at the mass of banks, churches, and government buildings resemble those in New York and Washington bars. Hollywood pictures run in all the better theaters, and the craving for American good things—Buicks, nylons, Parker 51 pens, and cigarettes—is as powerful here as in the other capitals of the world and, as in most

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of the capitals, there are no dollars and the black market thrives. The police do not interfere with it. Peddlers go among the tables offering pens and cigarettes. Some of these, especially the pens, are obvious counterfeits; the Lucky Strike packages are beautifully done; the blue tax-stamps are perfect; the cigarettes are filled with dung and crumbled straw. A boy comes with a huge gold ring to sell. He gives you glimpses of it in his cupped hands with exaggerated furtiveness, his face frantically thievish. It was a heavy, ugly, squarish ring, and you wonder who would ever buy it. He whispers, "It's stolen," and offers it for two hundred pesetas, one hundred, fifty, and then he gives you up with a sad, bored look and tries another table. Women flap their lottery tickets and beg tenaciously. Some of them carry blind or crippled infants and exhibit their maimed or withered legs. One, with a practiced movement, turns the child and shows me a face covered with sores and a pair of purulent eyes. Juanita, my Basque landlady at the pension, tells me that most of these children are hired out by the day to the professional beggars. It's all business, she contemptuously says.

In the dining room of the pension, the conversation is mainly about movie-stars. The commandante's wife is equally attracted to James Stewart and Clark Gable. The Sanchez sisters who were born in Hong Kong and speak English well are for Brian Aherne and Herbert Marshall, British types. Even the commandante has his favorites and adds his dry, nervous, harsh voice to the rattle of the women. The commandante is lean, correct, compressed, and rancorous and has a pock-marked face, a shallow pompadour, black eyes. He and the señora do not eat our ordinary bread. A black-market white loaf is delivered to them daily, and at noon he carries it under his arm like a swagger stick. There is a little military rush when they enter, she with small, pouncing steps, wagging her fan, he blind to us all but inclining his head. Even on the hottest days his tunic is buttoned to the throat. I offend him by coming to the dining room in a T-shirt and slippers. He sits down grimly to his meal, taking the señora's fan to cool his soup. His is the *dignidad* of gnawing hauteur and dislike, the hateful kind.

There is an important person in the pension, an admiral stationed at the ministry who never eats in the dining room and who often, in the afternoon, blunders through the dark, curtained rooms in his pajamas. Juanita enters his apartment without knocking and they are obviously on terms of intimacy. The Sanchez girls explain in an embarrassed way that the admiral is under a great obligation to Juanita who, during the civil war, concealed and nursed his sick son, or perhaps

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his nephew, and he swore to reward her. The Republic was unjust to the admiral. He taught at a very low salary in the naval academy. The commandante served under Franco in Morocco and is now head of a military school. He has the reputation of being a great disciplinarian, the sisters inform me rather proudly. They themselves were educated in a convent.

The rest are middle class, people who must be well connected to be able to afford a pension as good as this one, beneficiaries of *enchufismo* or civil-service patronage—literally, the *enchufe* is an electric socket. An ordinary civil-service job—and one must be, politically, as faultless as a sacrificial lamb to get it—carries a salary of five or six hundred pesetas a month, or roughly twenty dollars, and since *desirable* things are approximately American in price (higher, in many cases; a pound of black-market coffee costs two and a half dollars) a man needs *enchufes* to live comfortably. If, through family influence or friends high in the church or the army, he has several jobs, he makes the rounds of the ministries to sign in and sign out. Occasionally he may be required to do a little work and he does it *para cumplir,* to acknowledge the obligation, but as hastily as possible. This is in part traditional. All Spanish regimes have used the same means to keep the educated classes from disaffection. "Modern" government programs receive great publicity. Recently a social-security system modeled on the Beveridge plan was announced, and Sir William himself was invited for consultation. But the real purpose of these programs is to extend *enchufismo,* for the actual benefits to the sick or unemployed worker under this insurance scheme amount to about three pesetas a day, hardly enough for a loaf of bread. Franco has great-state ambitions, like Mussolini's, but Spain is too poor; the cost of staying in power is too high for him to realize them. The buildings called the New Ministries which were to have gone up monumentally at the foot of the Castellana stand in scaffolding, uncompleted, and apparently abandoned.

For middle-class families without *enchufes,* the difficulties are terrible. One must wear a European suit, a shirt that costs two hundred pesetas, a tie, and to appear in the rope *alpargatas* of the people is inconceivable. It is essential to have a maid. And then one's wife has to be properly dressed, and the children dressed and educated. One must cling to one's class. The fall into the one below is measureless. Its wretchedness is an ancient fact, stable, immemorial, and understood by everyone. The newer wretchedness, that of keeping one meager suit presentable, of making a place in the budget for movies in order to

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have something to contribute to polite conversation when *The Song of Bernadette* is discussed, of persisting to exhaustion among the stragglers in the chase after desirable things, the images of the earthly kingdom reflected in every casual American, is nevertheless not the wretchedness. That you see in the tenements and the inhabited ruins, old kilns and caves, the human swarms in the dry rot of Vallecas and Mataderos.

Summer is arid in Madrid, and cloudless. The sound of thunder is very rare. When it is heard, the maids cry out, *"Una tormenta!"* and dart through the pension slamming the windows. Across the air-shaft, the blonde Bibi calls "A storm!" to me in her tense, warlike voice, wavers behind the smoky glass and leaves the thick drapes trembling like the curtains of a stage on the last cry of a tragedy. Then the rain begins with a plunge, falling with the heaviness of drops of mercury.

In ten minutes it is over; ten minutes more and it has dried. On the hottest days the streets and the locust trees are watered morning and evening. The parks are divided by irrigation ditches and are grassless. The only grass I saw in Madrid, that before the Prado, was kept alive by continual sprinkling. As one goes out from the center of the city the green becomes more and more thin until, from the blank, sun-hardened flats of the outlying districts, overlooking the trenches which have sunk and are grown over with brown weeds and brown wires, there is only the scattered green of gardens on the immense plain, each garden with the diagonal pole of a well sweep rising above the Indian corn.

The Manzanares River is almost empty, yet on Sunday, in the section called the Bombilla where, in places, the water has collected to a depth of several inches, there are hundreds of bathers and picnickers in throngs at the working-class cafés for miles along the shores, the *gente humilde,* choking the streets and bridges and lying on blankets on the dusty banks under the scanty acacias. It is like a vision of the first moments of resurrection, seeing those families lying in the smothering dust and milling in the roads. On the city side there are homes in the ruins, fenced round with the wreckage of bombardments and rolls of barbed wire. A few gypsies live in the Bombilla, in wagons. They are not like the Andalusian gypsies; they have a citified, depressed air; the women, filthy and gaunt, sit by their iron pots; the children lie naked on sacking. Goats are tethered to the wheels and axles and under one wagon I saw two apes crouching spiritlessly. A factory that makes concrete tubes rises on the other side—a long, proudly lettered, modern

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industrial wall against which there are always a few men relieving themselves. Behind are the usual unfinished public works and miles away, far upland, is the intricate earthen blue of the Sierra which sends down the trickle of the Manzanares, more like the idea than the actuality of a river. It appears to be the idea, the *hope* of a river that attracts the gigantic crowd from the desert African dryness of the slums. The boys leap high into the air, as if the water were measured in feet, not inches, and the dust clings to their legs when they clamber up the bank. The river runs in a dirty green vein from shallow to shallow; gangs run yelling up and down the sand islands of its bed. A man leads his infant daughter, hardly old enough to walk, down to the water. She has soiled herself, and he washes her with a certain embittered tenderness while she clings screaming to his lanky, hairy legs.

Among the trees, surrounding the kiosks that sell wine and beer, the huge multitude is dancing, jogging up and down. Three young boys, self-contained, professional, indifferent to the dancers, play saxaphone, guitar, and drum, imitating the downtown version of American chic. Two drunken men are blowing the *gaita,* the hairy Galician bagpipes, for a group of drunken-looking friends. Madrid is said to be overrun with Gallegos; Franco himself is Galician and, in the old-fashioned Spanish belief in provincial loyalties, they come to the city by the thousands for jobs.

The soldiers in the crowd look thickset and short in their coarse jackets, gaiters, and big boots. They bump against the wheeling pairs of girls and try to force them apart. This is done seriously; there is little friskiness or gaiety, and you see few smiles. The dancers tramp and shuffle but, though excited and sweating, keep a straight-browed, straight-lipped formality of expression and hold themselves apart with rigid heads and shoulders.

The kiosks and the cafés do not sell food. The people bring their own bread and chick-peas. You can buy a meal at middle-class prices in the bowery beer gardens set apart behind lattice walls and bushes growing in tubs. In one of these places where I stop for a bottle of beer, there is a huge, time-eaten barrel organ that produces martial-sounding dances with missing notes, clanging bells, and queer, mechanical birdcalls. The man who winds it has the pride-bitten look of someone who has come down in the world and gives me a glance of "too good for my destiny and every bit as good as you are." His wife sits beside him, evidently to give him support in his humiliation, for she does not spell him at the organ. The brass drum inside catches the late sun on its

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short spines as it revolves. He is bald and small and his cheeks are taut and hard as he faces me, his mouth is bitter. His wife is passive and sits with quietly folded hands.

People complain rather freely on very short acquaintance about the regime: the shortness of the rations, the inferior bread, the black market, the army, the police, the Falange, and the church. *Madrileños* speak of the recent referendum on the law of succession as *el reverendum,* a priests' affair. It was conducted with the familiar, heavy-handed efficiency of fascist elections. Workers in the unreliable *barrios* of Mataderos, Vallecas, and Cuatro Caminos received ballots beforehand with a printed *Si.* Ration books which were not stamped at the polling-place to show that their holders had voted were invalid after election day. Nevertheless many people, monarchists as well as republicans, abstained, and even government figures acknowledged that a considerable number had voted *no*: 132,000 in Barcelona, 117,000 in Madrid, 36,000 in Seville. The socialists interpret the referendum as an attempt by the regime to convince the United States of its stability in order to obtain a loan. Franco has become very confident since the weeks after V-E Day when it was thought that he had lost together with Hitler. The Germans did as they liked in Madrid during the war, and everyone was therefore greatly surprised that Franco was allowed to remain in power after their defeat. But Britain and the United States did not stop selling him the gasoline without which his army, estimated at seven hundred thousand men, would have been paralyzed. And now, with the air of future allies, Spanish fascists tell you that no other country on the continent is so safe and convenient a base for the coming war with Russia. France and Italy are, or soon will be, communist. Spain is a strategic center owing to Gibraltar, and Franco's reliability as an old fighter against communism is appreciated by America. Besides, everybody knows what magnificent soldiers the Spanish are. It is curious how much national pride is mingled with the cynicism of the people who tell you this. Everyone, even communists and socialists, has a touch of this pride, and fascists and socialists alike joke explosively about the Italian disaster at Guadalajara: "The order was *'a la bayoneta'* and they thought it was *'a la camioneta'* "—"To the trucks!" instead of "Bayonet charge!"

There is, judging from the number of political arrests and the frequency and violence of the attacks in the press on Prieto and other exiled leaders, a great deal of underground activity. Several republicans

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told me that between November, 1946, and April, 1947, ten thousand people were imprisoned. CNT, UGT, and communist newspapers circulate in Madrid and other large cities, but there is little organized resistance except in isolated mountain districts in the north and in Andalusia. From abroad both the socialists and the communists claimed leadership in the short Asturian coal strike, which occurred in May, 1947, but little is actually known about it. Many socialists and republicans admit that the communist underground is growing, mainly because the international situation favors it. Of the Western countries, only France has boycotted Franco, and it is believed that the border was closed by the French government as a concession to the communists. The victory of the Labour Party did not change Britain's policy, notwithstanding the pledges of support made by Attlee to the Loyalists when he visited Spain during the civil war as his party's representative.

Alcalá de Henares, where I saw one of the political trials, is an ancient, decayed town, the birthplace of Cervantes and, in the fifteenth century, famous for its university. Ten men, tramway employees from Cuatro Caminos charged with distributing the communist paper *Mundo Obrero,* were the defendants. I was told by the son of one of them that they had been arrested sixteen months ago. Such trials are theoretically public but they are never announced; embassies and the foreign press are notified by the underground or by relatives of the accused. I came with one of the embassy secretaries, in a resplendent green embassy car before which soldiers and Guardia Civil gave way in the antique streets. *Diplomaticos,* we went unchallenged past the sentries and under rifles up the staircase into the long hall of the courtroom. It was lined with Guardia and their machine guns. We sat down at the rear among the families of the accused.

The court was a tribunal of officers, for members of illegal political parties are in the category of criminals endangering public safety and come under the army's jurisdiction. Looking toward the narrow windows, we could see only dimly. The prisoners were on benches with their backs turned to us. The members of the tribunal had the light behind them and their faces, too, were obscure. In profile at either side of the room were the prosecutor and the officer appointed for the defense. Boots and scabbards shone under the tables.

A clerk hurriedly reads the depositions of the ten. On such and such a night, Fulano de Tal met another conspirator in such and such a place and received or handed over money, instructions, papers. One

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by one the accused, called on by court or prosecutor, rise and acknowledge the confessions. Only one balks at a detail. He does not recall it. He is ordered to look at the signature of the deposition. Is it his? It is, but he cannot remember making the statement in point. Again, more impatiently, does he recognize the signature as his own? He does. Obviously, then, the statement is his. He is ordered to sit and he stiffly obeys. All the prisoners with the exception of two elderly men rise and stand with a military bearing, infected by the manner of the tribunal. To see them play the soldierly game and stand like *hombres honrados* to verify confessions extracted, everyone knows, in the cellars of the *Seguridad* affects me painfully, like the injection of a depressant that thickens the heartbeat. No doubt it is very *castizo,* purely and essentially Spanish, that the prisoners should conduct themselves like captives in an honorable war, and probably it also sustains them to stand at attention, but I have a horror of this game as I do of the commandante's bouncing and pivoting game in the pension, his peevish chivalry.

Each of the prisoners answers questions. The defense does not cross-examine them, no evidence is introduced, and there are no witnesses. You become aware, when the prosecutor stands up, of his large hands and powerful body; they give an effect of incongruity to the meticulousness of his uniform. He makes a neat prosecutor's packet of the depositions: "It is admitted . . . it is admitted . . . according to the statements of Fulano de Tal. . . . " Not until he concludes does he become bullish and exhortatory. He puts forth his strong voice suddenly. In cold blood, lifting up his chest, he begins to thunder that crimes "in a foreign spirit" against a whole people cannot be pardoned and he asks that the leader of the ten be given a twelve-year sentence and the rest four years each. W. whispers that this is relatively lenient. Then the defense lawyer reads a short statement to the effect that in the Christian democracy of the Caudillo's government there is room for differences of opinion when the expression of those differences is temperate. These words cause a sighing stir in the gloomy end of the room where the families sit. The prosecutor speaks for another half-hour in reply, his showmanship at times becoming perfunctory. This is a very minor trial. He towers before the window in the clear morning light of Castile and makes his last summation, reads from notes, and repeats his demand for twelve years and four. The time served awaiting trial does not count. The president of the tribunal now asks each of the prisoners in turn whether he has anything to say before sentence is passed. Six do not. The seventh, however, the leader of the ten, starts

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to speak; the president says loudly, *"Callese!"*—"Shut up!" The prisoner persisting, he rises and shouts, *"Callese!"* startling everyone. *"Nada de la política!* Sit down!" He sits. "Stand up!" The prisoner rises. "You have been heard on the evidence. Nothing else is relevant. There will be no politics here. Be seated." There is no other disturbance. The trial is over and we file down under the guns with the silent relatives. I see the grieving face of a boy on the stairs and I talk to him. His father is one of those who received four years. Will he be allowed to see him? He does not know; since the arrest he had not seen him till this morning. He is now the eldest at home. There was an older brother, but he disappeared in the last days of the war. He has another brother of eight and two sisters. "How do you live?" I ask; he does not reply. Thin and tall, he stands pigeon-toed beside me on the street, drawing his long hands out of his pocket and thrusting them back. His face is narrow and his soft eyes seem almost without whites: all center. I make a low voiced comment on the barbarousness of the trial. W. has meanwhile taken down the names of the condemned for his report and wants to leave, so I say goodbye, and we get into the car.

The uselessness of it afflicts me. Poverty and the harshness of the dictatorship make resistance inevitable, and the relations of powers outside the country make it vain, perfectly useless. The Spanish problem will not be settled within Spain. Franco wants to bargain with America, and the communist leaders, were they in power, would represent Russia. But people continue to struggle in the political spirit of past times when they were still free within national boundaries to make revolutions and create governments. There is no such freedom now, as a growing number of Europeans are aware. "We liberated ourselves from Napoleon in 1812," a Spanish acquaintance said to me, "and we manifested the same spirit in 1937 when we fought Hitler. Against him, however, we were powerless. And perhaps we might have been swallowed by Stalin if we had succeeded in defeating him. I dread another civil war here, for it would inevitably turn into the conflict of greater powers. The doctrines of 1789 are for us like the morals of Christianity: pieties. We are not strong enough to enjoy the Rights of Man. If Russia does not dominate us, your country will. We must resign ourselves to remaining subjects and withdraw our hopes of independence from the realm of politics to another realm."

Nearly every conversation in Madrid eventually turns to the subject of national character, and more than once I was referred by other

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foreigners to Unamuno's essay on Spanish envy and was quoted Quevedo's line, used as an epigraph by Unamuno: "Envy is lean; it bites but cannot swallow." An Italian explained to me that the Spaniards were half Moorish and that I would not understand them if I forgot it for an instant, and according to a German lady who has lived in Madrid for many years the great fault of the Spaniards was that they had no real feelings. After her brother's death, several *Madrileño* friends came to visit her. "They did not console me," she said. "They sat and talked of their *marmotas* (maids) and their children. They knew I was in mourning. They really are heartless." On the other hand Pio Baroja, with whom I had a conversation, found the German character inexplicable. "At first I could not believe that they were burning their captives in ovens. But then I met a young man who had lost his mother and a sister in that way. And to tell the truth I found Germany a queer place when I visited it in the twenties. In Hamburg a nudist family got on the streetcar: father, mother, and little ones all as naked as my hand, a family of petit bourgeois carrying bundles and packages like any petit-bourgeois family that has been shopping. And the parents weren't even handsome. The father had a huge *tripa,* like a barrel."

All these discussions of national character were occasions of resentment, and the resentment was particularly strong when it was the American character that was discussed. A traveling salesman said to me, his eyes aswim with poetic heat behind thick lenses, "America is still looking for a soul; our soul is very old." Others spoke of "American emptiness," "unhistorical Americans who live only in the future," etc.

But people, of course, feel the sway of American strength and American goods and the loss of their own liberty and strength. Until 1898, Spain still considered itself an empire, and for a nation of traditionalists, 1898 is by no means the distant past. The emphasis on national character is an emphasis on value. Take away the ignorant nonsense and there is still something left, namely, an assertion of worth in a world in which worth is synonymous with power, and power has passed to featureless mass societies for which the past has little meaning, and machinery, wealth, and organization topple the old dignity to replace it with contempt and discontent.

Between Malaga and Granada, at the railroad junction of Bobadilla shivering under the heat that darkened the stone hills and olive fields, I went into the station restaurant. It was a buffet, doing a feverish business in bread, grapes, tortillas, ham, boiled eggs, jelly sausage and blood sausage, salami, cheese, chicken, a huge abundance without boun-

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daries, spread on thick paper and shining with fat. There were two women and a man behind it. The man was middle-aged, gray-faced, and he coughed continually. Three or four strands of hair were arranged with elegant care over his bald head. He behaved toward me with iron *dignidad.* I was an American, therefore he refused to speak Spanish. He addressed me in a kind of French acquired, probably, in a restaurant in Madrid or Barcelona or in a luxury hotel on the Mediterranean and ripened during many isolated years in the desert wilderness of Bobadilla. *"Les oeufs son' a cinq cad' un, m'sieu."* He kept coughing softly and could not stop, obviously consumptive. *"Y que precio tienen las uvas?" "Cuat' le demi-kilo, m'sieu."* Great politeness; fiery politeness. Meanwhile he stared at me secretly with his rather vindictive eyes, the cough blurting softly through his lips so that his cheeks shook. By my accent, by the cut of my clothes, the pattern of my shoes and who knows what unconscious attributes, he recognized me as an American, one of the new lords of the earth, a new Roman, full of the pride of machines and dollars, passing casually through the junction where it was his fate to remain rotting to death. But he faced me at least with the proper *dignidad,* like the bitter organ-grinder in the Bombilla.

The commandante's dignity is something else again. The commandante is, after all, the tyrant's friend and the tyrant too believes in organization and is trying to trade his way into the new Imperium. The señora wears nylon stockings, and the commandante owns a marvelous cigarette-lighter, and I am sure he has a large supply of American flints.

Saul Bellow

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Sidney Hook

ON HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

> "Indeed, it is necessary to recognize as one of the principles of any unprejudiced view of politics that everything is possible in human affairs."—Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies**

In a period when so many large predictions have proved false, it is natural that the generous hopes based upon them should also decline. A mood of renunciation or opportunist drift replaces a belief in firm programs of social change. Sometimes, this is accompanied by a profound distrust of any historical generalizations, even of any historical knowledge sufficiently reliable to guide intelligent action. Instead of learning from the falsity of predictions to modify our hypotheses or to revise our estimates of particular historical situations, the whole field of historical knowledge becomes suspect.

A curious phenomenon then becomes observable in some quarters. Since where nothing is determined, anything can be believed, doctrines and ideals threatened with eclipse by the denouement of historical events are passionately reaffirmed as valid directives for action at any place and at any time. Determinism and determining tendencies are banished as bugbears. Fantasies are presented as if they were sober hypotheses. Political decisions no longer base themselves upon choices of better or worse, for now all alternatives seem equally possible. We may then with good conscience opt for the best even if it means a type of struggle against the better which insures the victory of the worst.

The quotation above from Karl Popper's talented but wayward book expresses in an extreme form one type of reaction to those whom he calls prophets of cultural determinism. Among them he includes such disparate figures as Plato, Hegel, Marx, Spengler, and Toynbee. It

* This work is divided into two volumes, of which *The Spell of Plato* is the first, and *The Mighty Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* the second. It has been published by Routledge in London. The quotation is from Vol. II, p. 185.

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expresses an understandable impatience with the view that from the standpoint of the present any determinate historical future is as inescapable as the past is irreversible. For to believe that the character of the future is in all fundamental respects now completely determined and at the same time to speak—as who does not?—of our historical period as one of great decisions, is intellectually incoherent.

No less incoherent, however, is the reaction which such a view begets if we read the sentence quoted from Popper with the same literalness with which Popper reads Plato and Marx. (I shall say something later about Popper's manner of reading.) If Popper means to say that everything is possible in human affairs because nothing is logically necessary, then this is true not only in human affairs but in nature as well. The denial of any physical law is not logically self-contradictory. To be consistent Popper would have to assert that if anything can happen in history, anything can happen in nature. Our naive belief, then, that human affairs are conditioned by the air we breathe and the food we eat must be dismissed as a prejudice. We may find nourishment in stones, and health in the fumes of cyanide. Logically both in history and nature, anything can happen at any time at any place to anyone. This may be an unprejudiced view of politics. It is obviously an insane view as anyone can discover if he tries to act on it.

Indeed, one of the marks of sanity is the realization that not everything can happen in nature. Wishes cannot be ridden like horses and pious thoughts cannot turn away flying missiles. If it is false that everything can happen in nature, it is also false that everything can happen in human affairs because all human affairs depend upon regularities in natural affairs. We must therefore conclude it is one of the principles of any sane view of politics to *disbelieve* that everything is possible in human affairs. And Popper himself in his less splenetic moods must agree with this. For otherwise everything he says about the desirability and practicability of piecemeal social engineering is nonsense.

Can we hold the position that there are determinate connections or causal laws relating groups of events without embracing the myth of inevitability and other mystical doctrines? Obviously. In the natural sciences on the basis of such general laws and knowledge of particular situations, we can predict occurrences without treating the events predicted as fatalities. Sometimes we can forestall the event we predict by intervening into natural processes. The things we create, the things we control, are testimony to the power which knowledge of natural determinations gives us over nature—not complete power but enough

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to make the difference often between life and death.

If we use the term "history" to designate the realm of human affairs, then the fundamental question is whether scientific method can be applied to history. If it can, then we should not believe that everything which is logically possible or even imaginable is therefore historically possible. At the same time we free ourselves from the notion that anything in history is guaranteed or compelled to happen. We can recognize that in certain situations the outcome of a state of affairs depends in some respects upon what human beings do or leave undone. And this recognition is perfectly compatible with the realization that in other respects and in other situations, what the future will be does not depend upon anything human beings, as they are presently constituted, can do even though it still remains true that the future is not completely determined. Other things may affect it.

From this point of view the concepts of *historical* necessity and *historical* impossibility are not only legitimate but indispensable provided we interpret them as expressing certain limiting notions—the compounding of probabilities and improbabilities which justify us in saying that one event is overwhelmingly likely and its opposite overwhelming unlikely. Most historical events, fortunately, are neither historically necessary nor historically impossible. In the natural world we use expressions like "physically necessary" and "physically impossible" in an analogous sense.

The recognition that the logic of scientific inquiry in history is identical with the logic of scientific inquiry in nature is not gainsaid by the obvious fact that we know far less about history than we do about nature. We know far less about meteorology than we do about physics. Historical terms are ill-defined and the general laws on the basis of which we make predictions are vague and unrelated to each other. And yet so many of them are relevant to historical situations that the task of the historian becomes far more complex than that of the natural scientist. But once a definite historical problem is formulated, a beginning can be made. Despite our methodological doubts we recognize that some historical explanations and some predictions about human affairs are better warranted than others. When we seek to make explicit why one historical account or prediction is more adequate or truer than another, it is always in terms of a common pattern of inquiry employed in any field where the distinction between truth and fiction has a meaning.

One of the most questionable aspects of Popper's procedure is lump-

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ing together thinkers like Marx who in principle seek to apply scientific method to history with men like Spengler who deny that anything recognizable as scientific method is applicable to history, and with philosophers like Plato and Hegel for whom the very subject matter of empirical history is outside the realm of "reality." That is why his entire book, interesting and suggestive as it is, is an intellectual amalgam in which the ideas of eternalists like Plato and temporalists like Marx are linked together by the doctrine of "historicism." By historicism, Popper means the thesis that "history is controlled by developmental laws whose discovery would enable us to prophesy the destiny of man." As it stands such a doctrine is metaphysical or poetical, and if historical method entails the acceptance of historicism it can be rejected out of hand. Strip it of references to "prophecy" and "destiny," and all that it tells us is that cultures and historical institutions are subject to laws of development. This is not a method but a conclusion. Specify what aspects of culture and what institutional activities we are talking about, distinguish between historical change and historical development, indicate the schema of the stages of development—and it can be shown that it is a false conclusion. This is precisely what modern anthropologists did in disproving the universality of Morgan's laws of development for the family, the state, and property. If it were true that social systems, wherever found, are subject to laws of development roughly analogous to the development of human organisms, it would not be necessary to rest in possession of this knowledge. We could inquire into the complex of factors which explained its development, their constancy, and the consequences of altering them if we could.

The amazing thing about Popper's discussion is that there is no clear discussion as to what he means by "the historical method." An historian may reject "historicism" even when it is formulated as an empirical hypothesis. In fact, most historians do so on the basis of the evidence. Are they not using the historical method to reject "historicism"? Does historical method mean anything more than the application of scientific methods to the subject matter of history? Granted that the subject matter of human history is studied by different techniques from those employed in physics or natural history. Does that necessitate the recognition of a distinctive method or logic of historical understanding or inquiry? I am not certain that I understand Popper's answers. At any rate, it is clear that the existence of geology as a field of inquiry does not presuppose that there is a geological method of inquiry except in the innocent sense of methods of geology.

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Nor does the uniqueness or individuality of a sequence of events in time make it an historical event. Else all the unique events studied by geology, astronomy, biology, and psychology must be considered historical, too. And if they are, it is clear that we cannot make a beginning towards understanding them without causal laws. It sometimes appears that in human history we are more interested in individual and non-repetitive events than in the natural sciences. But this is a result of a terminological habit of identifying science with abstract theoretical laws already formulated in textbooks instead of with scientific procedures which are concerned with particular cases. The determination of a particular case may sometimes be decisive in invalidating or confirming an abstract law. All events are unique: the events studied by the historian are influenced by more events than those studied by the natural scientist.

Perhaps the phrase "*the* historical method" means different things to different people, and the sense in which it is used varies with contexts. If Popper thinks he is using the historical method in interpreting the ideas of Plato and Hegel and Marx the less we have of it the better. Whatever is valid in his criticisms—denunciations would be more accurate—of Plato has already been said in Warner Fite's *The Platonic Legend,* a study which itself suffers from one-sidedness. To this Popper adds the epithet of "totalitarian party-politician" in a vein reminiscent of Bukharin's reference to Plato as "a man of outspoken Black Hundred tendencies." Popper reads the texts like a prosecuting attorney intent on a conviction. He distorts the allegory of the metals in Book III of the *Republic* to prove that Plato advocated an hereditary caste system and ignores the significance of the Myth of Er in Book X in which Plato's ironic commentary on the effects of living in the Republic reinforces suggestions made elsewhere that the Republic was not offered as a cookbook of political recipes.

Of Hegel, he writes: "Thus the formula of the Fascist brew is in all countries the same: Hegel plus a dash of 19th century materialism." This should be news to Franco, Salsazar, and Dollfuss. It would have been news to the Nazi party philosophers who drew their inspiration from Houston Chamberlain. It was the Race, they deified, not the State, and Race conceived in mystical, not materialistic, terms. Popper's remarks on Hegel are as objective as the Nazi estimates of the Old Testament patriarchs.

What shall we say of an historical evaluation which applies to a figure in the past a contemporary rubric which has other antecedents,

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which lumps together conservatives, reactionaries, and fascists, which sees the "one original feature" of fascism not in the fact that it rests on a mass base but in the fact that it makes no open appeal to the supernatural? Put in its mildest terms, we shall say that it violates well-known canons of scientific procedure—examination of negative evidence, analysis of alternative hypotheses.

Although Popper is kinder to Marx's intentions than to those of other thinkers, his explication of Marx's meaning converts his sentences from propositions that might be true or false into statements that are empirically meaningless. Thus, "Marx's historical philosophy substitutes for (the chosen race) the chosen class . . . to inherit the earth." But it was not a mystical or religious belief which led Marx to conceive of socialism as primarily a working-class movement. His analysis of capitalism led him to the conclusion that the working class had the greatest interest in the abolition of capitalism, that whereas all other social groups could solve or adjust their problems short of the transformation of the system, this was not possible for the working-class, especially in respect to continuous employment and achievement of a civilized standard of living. Marx's reasons may have been wrong. But at this point he has not been victimized by unanalyzable abstractions.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of the kind of brashness which mars Popper's discussion is found in his dismissal of the traditional Marxist claim that the evils incident to capitalism outweigh the evils of revolution. Popper airily rejects this view as "an utterly irresponsible piece of oracular pretence." Yet the argument on which it is based is familiar, and during the early years of the Russian Revolution both Lenin and Trotsky made effective use of it. According to them, not only were poverty, insecurity, and unemployment recurrent consequences of capitalism; *war,* too, was endemic to capitalism. In response to those who condemned revolution on the ground of its costs, they scornfully pointed to the holocaust of millions in World War I and predicted further wars if capitalism survived. Some latter-day orthodox Marxists have repeated the argument on the assumption that World War II was an imperialist war. And certainly, we would all agree that if World War II could have been avoided by a violent uprising against Hitler, the consequences of civil war in Germany could hardly have been any worse for Europe than what actually occurred.

I am not here maintaining that this argument in its traditional form is sound. On the contrary if it is universalized, it is false. Obviously one can deny that world wars are historically necessary consequences

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of capitalism and even Stalin has apparently changed his mind about the imperialist character of World War II. In addition, objections to the Bolshevik, or any other, coup d'état do not rest merely on the unnecessary violence involved but on its undemocratic usurpation of power and the brutalizing results for the culture as a whole. In general, it is necessary to distinguish between the questions whether socialism should be achieved democratically, and whether it can be achieved peacefully. The first may be answered unqualifiedly, but not the second. But all this aside, what I *am* maintaining here is that to dismiss this whole complex of considerations with words like "utterly irresponsible" and "oracular pretence" is itself a kind of intellectual irresponsibility on Popper's part which makes one uncomfortable and distrustful even when one finds oneself in agreement with him. He has no sense of the complexities and subtleties of historical situations and is more of a moralist than a scientific historian of events and ideas.

The historical method is no more scientific when it is used to prove that historical events are necessary just because *these* events took place and not others. Consider, for example, the way in which Harold Laski appeals to *the* historical method in criticizing socialist critics of Soviet terror. He maintains that Bolshevik ruthlessness was necessary in order to build up the country to make the plants to make the steel to make the guns . . . that beat Hitler. And Hitler was beaten. This proves by the historical approach that the Constituent Assembly and democratic processes had to be destroyed to build up the country, that the purges were required to insure steel production, and that the Hitler-Stalin pact was necessary to achieve victory. No consideration is given to other alternatives of action that were open and which would have prevented perhaps the rise of Hitler, or his declaration of war if confronted at the very outset by a two-front war, or would have insured his earlier defeat if millions of freedom-loving Russians had not been liquidated or sent to languish in concentration camps. Laski's "historical method" is merely a vulgar justification after the event of whatever is, on the ground that what is had to be. Among other absurd consequences this establishes that Laski's existence—together with everybody else's—is historically necessary.

This historical method is sometimes invoked in order to make a distinction between the historical laws of the social sciences and the non-historical laws of the natural sciences. The ambiguities here are not difficult to resolve. Capitalism as a set of institutions is an historical phenomenon. But the laws of capitalism are not historical. They would

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hold, if valid, for any historical period that can legitimately be regarded as capitalistic. They would hold even if capitalism as a social system were to disappear. Natural laws, too, hold under certain limiting conditions which have a temporal character. But once these conditions are stated, it becomes clear that the laws are not historical. The laws of human growth would still remain valid even if the human race in its present form disappeared from the face of the earth.

It is interesting to note that Marx believed that there were social laws so comprehensive in character that they held for all human societies. But he regarded them as trivial from the point of view of his special purposes which were to study the laws specific to capitalist production. With justice he contended that Locke's conception of human behavior universalized what was true only for capitalist societies. But at the same time he himself erred in restricting the scope of some of the laws he formulated to class societies as he defined them. "No ruling class voluntarily surrenders its power" holds not only for societies in which instruments of production are privately owned but also for societies in which they are nationalized.

A more legitimate conception of historical method calls attention to the fact that the explanatory categories of historical understanding are purposive and social—that history cannot be "reduced" to a chapter of physics or biology. But the purposes and traditions of men to which we relate our historical explanations must be identified in the same way as we identify other traits in nature and life, not through a unique act of intuition but through publicly observable acts or what can legitimately be inferred from such acts. But since human purposes have conditions and effects that cannot be understood in terms of these purposes, sometimes a physical or biological explanation will be a relevant part of the answer to questions of history.

The broadest and the most difficult sense in which the historical method is taken equates it with tracing the succession of historical antecedents to any event that challenges explanation. The study of the present as a continuation of the past out of which it has developed, the uncovering of the genetic pattern which precedes the present, has been laid down as a mandate for all significant historical inquiry. Not alone to historians does it seem axiomatic that knowledge of the past is the key to the understanding of the present. And yet examined more closely this is a highly dubious proposition. *Tradition, for example, never explains the influence of tradition, why some traditions disappear, others are modified, and new ones emerge.* Even in the field of folklore where

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study of the past seems sufficient to explain all phenomena of the present it is often far from the mark. The significance of numerology or expressions like "knock wood!" is not to be found in the past astrological beliefs out of which they arise but in what they reveal about the present helplessness of modern man, his superstitious fears, his unscientific attitude toward science.

At the same time it is undeniable that the solution of some problems in the present like those in mental hygiene and medicine require genetic inquiries into the past in order to predict future outcomes. Popper's book contributes precisely nothing to elaborating the criteria which enables us to distinguish problems in human affairs that require genetic inquiries for their solution from those that do not. In extenuation, however, it may be pointed out that in neglecting this task, Popper is not alone.

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FILM CHRONICLE

THE GANGSTER AS TRAGIC HERO

America, as a social and political organization, is committed to a cheerful view of life. It could not be otherwise. The sense of tragedy is a luxury of aristocratic societies, where the fate of the individual is not conceived of as having a direct and legitimate political importance, being determined by a fixed and supra-political—that is, non-controversial—moral order or fate. Modern equalitarian societies, however, whether democratic or authoritarian in their political forms, always base themselves on the claim that they are making life happier; the avowed function of the modern state, at least in its ultimate terms, is not only to regulate social relations, but also to determine the quality and the possibilities of human life in general. Happiness thus becomes the chief political issue—in a sense, the only political issue—and for that reason it can never be treated as an issue at all. If an American or a Russian is unhappy, it implies a certain reprobation of his society, and therefore, by a logic of which we can all recognize the necessity, it becomes an obligation of citizenship to be cheerful; if the authorities find it necessary, the citizen may even be compelled to make a public display of his cheerfulness on important occasions, just as he may be conscripted into the army in time of war.

Naturally, this civic responsibility rests most strongly upon the organs of mass culture. The individual citizen may still be permitted his private unhappiness so long as it does not take on political significance, the extent of this tolerance being determined by how large an area of private life the society can accommodate. But every production of mass culture is a public act and must conform with accepted notions of the public good. Nobody seriously questions the principle that it is the function of mass culture to maintain public morale, and certainly nobody in the mass audience objects to having his morale maintained.[1]

[1] In her testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Mrs. Leila Rogers said that the movie *None But the Lonely Heart* was un-

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At a time when the normal condition of the citizen is a state of anxiety, euphoria spreads over our culture like the broad smile of an idiot. In terms of attitudes towards life, there is very little difference between a "happy" movie like *Good News,* which ignores death and suffering, and a "sad" movie like *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,* which uses death and suffering as incidents in the service of a higher optimism.

But, whatever its effectiveness as a source of consolation and a means of pressure for maintaining "positive" social attitudes, this optimism is fundamentally satisfying to no one, not even to those who would be most disoriented without its support. Even within the area of mass culture, there always exists a current of opposition, seeking to express by whatever means are available to it that sense of desperation and inevitable failure which optimism itself helps to create. Most often, this opposition is confined to rudimentary or semi-literate forms: in mob politics and journalism, for example, or in certain kinds of religious enthusiasm. When it does enter the field of art, it is likely to be disguised or attenuated: in an unspecific form of expression like jazz, in the basically harmless nihilism of the Marx Brothers, in the continually reasserted strain of hopelessness that often seems to be the real meaning of the soap opera. The gangster film is remarkable in that it fills the need for disguise (though not sufficiently to avoid arousing uneasiness) without requiring any serious distortion. From its beginnings, it has been a consistent and astonishingly complete presentation of the modern sense of tragedy.[2]

In its initial character, the gangster film is simply one example of the movies' constant tendency to create fixed dramatic patterns that can be repeated indefinitely with a reasonable expectation of profit. One gangster film follows another as one musical or one Western follows another. But this rigidity is not necessarily opposed to the requirements of art. There have been very successful types of art in the past which developed such specific and detailed conventions as almost to make individual examples of the type interchangeable. This is true, for example, of Elizabethan revenge tragedy and Restoration comedy.

American because it was gloomy. Like so much else that was said during the unhappy investigation of Hollywood, this statement was at once stupid and illuminating. One knew immediately what Mrs. Rogers was talking about; she had simply been insensitive enough to carry her philistinism to its conclusion.

[2] Efforts have been made from time to time to bring the gangster film into line with the prevailing optimism and social constructiveness of our culture; *Kiss of Death* is a recent example. These efforts are usually unsuccessful; the reasons for their lack of success are interesting in themselves, but I shall not be able to discuss them here.

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For such a type to be successful means that its conventions have imposed themselves upon the general consciousness and become the accepted vehicles of a particular set of attitudes and a particular aesthetic effect. One goes to any individual example of the type with very definite expectations, and originality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it. Moreover, the relationship between the conventions which go to make up such a type and the real experience of its audience or the real facts of whatever situation it pretends to describe is of only secondary importance and does not determine its aesthetic force. It is only in an ultimate sense that the type appeals to its audience's experience of reality; much more immediately, it appeals to previous experience of the type itself: it creates its own field of reference.

Thus the importance of the gangster film, and the nature and intensity of its emotional and aesthetic impact, cannot be measured in terms of the place of the gangster himself or the importance of the problem of crime in American life. Those European movie-goers who think there is a gangster on every corner in New York are certainly deceived, but defenders of the "positive" side of American culture are equally deceived if they think it relevant to point out that most Americans have never seen a gangster. What matters is that the experience of the gangster *as an experience of art* is universal to Americans. There is almost nothing we understand better or react to more readily or with quicker intelligence. The Western film, though it seems never to diminish in popularity, is for most of us no more than the folklore of the past, familiar and understandable only because it has been repeated so often. The gangster film comes much closer. In ways that we do not easily or willingly define, the gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects "Americanism" itself.

The gangster is the man of the city, with the city's language and knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club. For everyone else, there is at least the theoretical possibility of another world—in that happier American culture which the gangster denies, the city does not really exist; it is only a more crowded and more brightly lit country —but for the gangster there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not the real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world. And the gangster—though there are real gangsters—is

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also, and primarily, a creature of the imagination. The real city, one might say, produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster: he is what we want to be and what we are afraid we may become.

Thrown into the crowd without background or advantages, with only those ambiguous skills which the rest of us—the real people of the real city—can only pretend to have, the gangster is required to make his way, to make his life and impose it on others. Usually, when we come upon him, he has already made his choice or the choice has already been made for him, it doesn't matter which: we are not permitted to ask whether at some point he could have chosen to be something else than what he is.

The gangster's activity is actually a form of rational enterprise, involving fairly definite goals and various techniques for achieving them. But this rationality is usually no more than a vague background; we know, perhaps, that the gangster sells liquor or that he operates a numbers racket; often we are not given even that much information. So his activity becomes a kind of pure criminality: he hurts people. Certainly our response to the gangster film is most consistently and most universally a response to sadism; we gain the double satisfaction of participating vicariously in the gangster's sadism and then seeing it turned against the gangster himself.

But on another level the quality of irrational brutality and the quality of rational enterprise become one. Since we do not see the rational and routine aspects of the gangster's behavior, the practice of brutality—the quality of unmixed criminality—becomes the totality of his career. At the same time, we are always conscious that the whole meaning of this career is a drive for success: the typical gangster film presents a steady upward progress followed by a very precipitate fall. Thus brutality itself becomes at once the means to success and the content of success—a success that is defined in its most general terms, not as accomplishment or specific gain, but simply as the unlimited possibility of aggression. (In the same way, film presentations of businessmen tend to make it appear that they achieve their success by talking on the telephone and holding conferences and that success *is* talking on the telephone and holding conferences.)

From this point of view, the initial contact between the film and its audience is an agreed conception of human life: that man is a being with the possibilities of success or failure. This principle, too, belongs to the city; one must emerge from the crowd or else one is nothing. On

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that basis the necessity of the action is established, and it progresses by inalterable paths to the point where the gangster lies dead and the principle has ben modified: there is really only one possibility—failure. The final meaning of the city is anonymity and death.

In the opening scene of *Scarface,* we are shown a successful man; we know he is successful because he has just given a party of opulent proportions and because he is called Big Louie. Through some monstrous lack of caution, he permits himself to be alone for a few moments. We understand from this immediately that he is about to be killed. No convention of the gangster film is more strongly established than this: it is dangerous to be alone. And yet the very conditions of success make it impossible not to be alone, for success is always the establishment of an *individual* pre-eminence that must be imposed on others, in whom it automatically arouses hatred; the successful man is an outlaw. The gangster's whole life is an effort to assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, and he always dies *because* he is an individual; the final bullet thrusts him back, makes him, after all, a failure. "Mother of God," says the dying Little Caesar, "is this the end of Rico?"—speaking of himself thus in the third person because what has been brought low is not the undifferentiated *man,* but the individual with a name, the gangster, the success; even to himself he is a creature of the imagination. (T. S. Eliot has pointed out that a number of Shakespeare's tragic heroes have this trick of looking at themselves dramatically; their true identity, the thing that is destroyed when they die, is something outside themselves—not a man, but a style of life, a kind of meaning.)

At bottom, the gangster is doomed because he is under the obligation to succeed, not because the means he employs are unlawful. In the deeper layers of the modern consciousness, *all* means are unlawful, every attempt to succeed is an act of aggression, leaving one alone and guilty and defenseless among enemies: one is *punished* for success. This is our intolerable dilemma: that failure is a kind of death and success is evil and dangerous, is—ultimately—impossible. The effect of the gangster film is to embody this dilemma in the person of the gangster and resolve it by his death. The dilemma is resolved because it is *his* death, not ours. We are safe; for the moment, we can acquiesce in our failure, we can choose to fail.

Robert Warshow

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BOOKS

WILSON AMONG THE RUINS

EUROPE WITHOUT BAEDEKER. Sketches Among the Ruins of Italy, Greece, and England. By Edmund Wilson. Doubleday. $4.00.

The main components of this book are: 1) an extremely able report on what London, Rome, Milan, Athens were like in the spring and summer of 1945, just after the end of the war. Mr. Wilson's sense of the significant detail is quick and precise, sometimes (as in the way he catches the Roman atmosphere with its peculiar mixture of felicity and nastiness) amazing. The face he noticed, at a Labourite meeting, of an elderly Englishwoman, "eyes intent yet staring, and with a peculiar hungriness and gauntness . . . as if she belonged to a quite distinct human breed from even the poor people of peacetime communities, to a breed with ravenous eyes that . . . saw only with appetites that were simple and stringent," is indeed symbolic of postwar Europe; 2) a determination to get back at the British which remains unabated from the first page of the book to the very last. Mr. Wilson's pursuit of the British character is so dogged that it can hardly denote real malevolence. In fact, it is fundamentally good humored, a kind of cat-and-mouse game which looks a bit unfair at times, since it is played mostly against that ready-made caricature, the British Official; 3) a generous impulse to take sides with downtrodden people, like the Italians and the Greeks, against British and (less bitterly, on account of their supposed innocence) American policies; 4) an utter disgust with humanity in its present state. A theory of this disgust is sketched in the last chapter of the book, where we are invited to face "the fact that man is himself an animal." One should say that, in comparison with Mr. Wilson's misanthropy, his anglophobia seems quite harmless, a mere irritation at the fact that the British are so snobbish about the rest of us animals; 5) a number of considerations on the future of Western civilization, most of them hard to discuss since they are carefully kept down to a conversational level, so that one is made to feel that it might be petulant

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to take issue with them. More often than not, Mr. Wilson touches upon controversial issues with the tone of the British gentleman who, as the story goes, didn't like arguments; 6) a moderate satisfaction with America as compared with Europe in its present state, combined with a scarcely hidden (but watchfully controlled) perplexity about the fundamental questions of today.

Perplexed satisfaction, or satisfied perplexity, is in fact one of the most characteristic traits of Mr. Wilson as a traveling observer. Peculiarly revealing in this respect, I feel, is the note on which he chooses to end his book. Recounting the visit he paid in Edinburgh to his old philosophy teacher, Professor Kemp Smith, the author tells us briefly of a conversation he had with him: "I remarked that the immediate future seemed to me extremely depressing, and he vigorously took me up, declaring that he thought it looked hopeful. When I asked him how he could possibly think this, he replied: 'People's complacency's shaken' . . . when I said that I thought it was time to get rid of the word *God,* since we had 'no need of that hypothesis' . . . he said, 'I don't know of any better word.' . . . For myself, I am extremely reluctant to call anything whatever 'God,' for the word has too many connotations of obsolete and miraculous mythologies. . . ."

One wonders about the meaning of such a rapid dismissal. It is as if the author had been at the same time perturbed and reassured by the old scholar's sudden insistence on God. If the word *God* had not "too many connotations of obsolete and miraculous mythologies," he would, so it seems, be willing to take the idea into consideration. On the other hand, he has just tried to shrug off the whole question with a retort which was not only Laplace's but also Monsieur Homais'. Neither argument carries conviction, in either direction. In the interval, the author has managed to suggest the existence, or at least the non-inexistence, of a problem. But he himself makes a point of clinging to the approved views of scientific atheism. The perturbation was slight, and so was the reassurance. The incident ends with Mr. Wilson's being both right and wrong. Right, because it can certainly be argued that the situation of man today is not made any clearer by bringing in the question of God; wrong, because it is also certain that atheism is not such an easy position to maintain. On the contrary, it is very difficult, and valid only insofar as it is felt to be difficult.

It might seem petulant indeed to take up Mr. Wilson's casual stand on the existence of God. But it cannot be mere coincidence if his book ends with it. The fact is that his wanderings through Europe

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seem to have urged upon him a number of questions—from the beastliness of modern man to the future of Western civilization—which are of a markedly speculative character. I would even say that it is this irrepressible undercurrent of speculative anxiety which (together with his effort to control and even eliminate it for the sake of polished communication) gives tension to Mr.Wilson's otherwise quite unruffled reporting.

I have stated that one of the main components of these "sketches" is the author's disgust with humanity. Although this theme does not take as much space as the humorous polemic against the British, some eloquent pages are devoted to it. "Today it is perfectly plain," remarks Mr. Wilson, "that human life is no longer an issue. No one pretends to give a damn any more. . . . We can contemplate now with equanimity . . . a kind of warfare that crushes whole cities and that brings down agony and death on thousands of women and children." "During the last war . . . there was . . . a humanitarian reaction against the practice of war itself; but in this one the German methods have ended by making everybody more callous and by interesting the practical Americans in the technical side of the business, as if mechanized large-scale homicide were a normal occupation."

This is, no doubt, the dominant mood of the book. Hitler and mechanized warfare, together with the phenomena of Stalin and Stalinism, have filled Mr. Wilson with a hopeless nausea. No person in his right senses can, I suppose, escape such a feeling today. It is so pervasive, and so extreme, that it makes any attempted catharsis seem futile and cowardly. Having been struck by it, the author seeks no catharsis. He simply finds "relief and stimulus" in the contemplation of the anthropoids. He thinks that nineteenth-century evolutionists were still "snobbish" about the apes, insofar as they continued "to draw a definite line between human and animal kind." It seems that the researches of Mr. Robert M. Yerkes of the Yale Institute of Psychology have definitely proved that apes are more like us than we thought. It has even been suggested that "chimpanzees—which can be taught to sew—might be trained to do the work of mechanics."

By realizing in our turn that we are more like apes than we supposed ourselves to be, we might simplify our problems, which have been hopelessly messed up by our pretenses about "reason," "civilization," and so forth. As a result, if we are rational about it, we might have a chance to start a new streamlined, and controlled, kind of evolution. Mr. Wilson believes that democratic socialism is definitely possible, in the United

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States at least. But he also believes that socialism should "presently change its object" from that "of making everybody healthy and happy" to that of "turning out better human beings." He advocates planned economy plus planned eugenics. "The respect for human life in itself," he insists, "has in any case largely disappeared in the course of this last war, and I doubt whether enough now survives to inspire the organizers of socialism to try to keep everybody alive and see that everybody gets an equal chance." Such being the case, we shouldn't delay too long the institution of a "Board of Breeding." "If we can produce, from some cousin of the jackal and the wolf, the dachshund and the Great Dane, the Pekinese and the poodle, what should we not be able to do with man?"

All this is quite remarkable. Above all, it is a howl of dejection as lugubrious as can be heard today in this jungle-world of ours, a kind of American answer to Silone's yearning for the inarticulate and the dumb in *The Seed Beneath the Snow*. As a sign of the times, it cannot be dismissed easily. Even the fact that Mr. Wilson apparently does not realize that his is the old "snobbish" faith in Progress and Evolution, with all meaning squeezed out of it, seems to me significant. Mr. Wilson wants his nausea to be constructive. He does not want to shed either the nausea or the assurance that the key to the whole damn business must after all be of a technological nature. The result is more and more nausea, the image of a technocratic Demiurge setting out to reshape the Cosmos around an imperishable axis of disgust and boredom. Sartre has said that "man is a useless passion" which *must* be upheld. To Mr. Wilson, it appears, man is a useless busyness which, as a matter of sheer fact, happens to persist; hence we had better be rational, and routinize him thoroughly and efficiently. As things now stand, the realization of the author's ideal would seem to require no considerable leap in the evolutionary process.

If I have laid such heavy stress on Mr. Wilson's speculations, it is because the kind of myth he is finally led to outline, however contradictory, is revealing. Insofar as Mr. Wilson's utopia is not inconsistent with a number of currently accepted premises, it is, I think, typical, and certainly not unrelated to present American moods. There are many people today who, like Edmund Wilson, feel that their fundamental convictions and hopes have been profoundly shaken and, at the same time, that they must stick to any notion which seems to guarantee that those convictions are still intact, and that theirs is nothing but an emotional state. Hence, such people keep up a sort of dejected optimism:

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everything they assert implies the persistence of a robust faith, while everything they feel is tinged with gloom and spreads gloom. Not many of them, however, are willing to develop the logic of their attitude in any definite direction. One should be grateful to Mr. Wilson for the frankness with which he has sketched out his own image of the world—his own non-miraculous mythology, that is.

Nicola Chiaromonte

ILLUSIONS OF PURE CONSCIOUSNESS

MONSIEUR TESTE. By Paul Valéry. Translated and with an introduction by Jackson Mathews. Knopf. $5.00.

"A pure thought lasts only for a moment," Valéry once said, and in Monsieur Teste he sought to project a character who would live only to reach, extend, and enrich such moments. Valéry was in the habit, Mr. Mathews tells us in his introduction, of rising at five in the morning to take notes on the coming of consciousness, and of this prodigious labor of introspection carried on over a lifetime *Monsieur Teste* is one of the most remarkable fruits. We are grateful to Knopf for its publication in English, and to Mr. Mathews for an excellent introduction; but I think the public might have been better served if, instead of making this single brief work a *de luxe* item at five dollars, the publishers had permitted Mr. Mathews to range more widely and collect Valéry's other prose works which deal with the same themes as *Monsieur Teste*. The subject, and possible title, of such an anthology would be: Valéry as Thinker; and it might contain, besides *Teste,* the two essays on Leonardo, one of the essays on Descartes, the extraordinary *"Mauvaises Pensées"* (Wicked Thoughts), as well as several other items. It would be a valuable collection, one of the imperishable records in modern literature of a mind at grips with itself.

And yet, Valéry as thinker is probably unimportant apart from Valéry as poet, and what we call his "thought" is perhaps of fundamental interest only in relation to the poetry. There is a deep irony in this when we reflect that Valéry gave up poetry and literature for almost twenty years because they were not "precise" enough—a renunciation that came, significantly enough, not long after the publication of *Monsieur Teste;* yet the more we seek to pin down his "thought," so volatile and so often at odds with itself, the less likely we are to find that it conveys

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any substantial doctrine valid beyond the existence of the particular man and writer. His hunt through the thickets of consciousness came up only with some fine phrases, metaphors for poetry. The chase could lead nowhere else, for the point of departure was illusory. The mind disappears into its subject matter; consciousness is known only through its objects and the conditions under which it arises; "The mind is in a way its objects," said old Aristotle in one of the most triumphant statements in his *Psychology*. In another direction, psychoanalysis has shown us that the contents of the psyche hardly lie open to direct inspection by the conscious ego. Introspection is a trap: it opens infinite mirrors in which our image is redoubled infinitely, and each new attitude and posture of questioning is likely to beget only a new image of distortion. Valéry loved these mirrors, he loved to wander in this labyrinth, but he forgot the minotaur that must be found at the end of all those stumbling passageways.

(To sum this up in the jargon of the philosophers: nothing is understood except as an object, not even the mind; we do not understand it by experiencing it exquisitely as a subject.)

And, in fact, the important thing is the work to be done, the beast to be dispatched, and perhaps the greater the mind the more directly it will traverse these passageways. Thus we might well ask whether the two essays on Leonardo do not represent one of the most misguided, though marvelous and exciting, explorations of the psychology of artistic and intellectual creation. That the work may be *willed*, brought into being step by step by a deliberate method that excludes chance, hardly tells the real story of creation. Probably the figure of Leonardo that Valéry constructs is as impossible of existence as Teste, and even in the historical Leonardo it may have been some real deficiency that was responsible for his halting production. We think of other examples of creators, besides Leonardo, on whom Valéry might have drawn: Newton coming home tired from the Mint to write off the solution of a mathematical problem over which the scholarly brains of Europe had been poring for months; Pascal on his sickbed solving the problem of the cycloid; Mozart writing an overture with the spontaneity of a bird producing its song. We do not know what Shakespeare's method of composition was, but we suspect that it did not resemble the one elaborated by Valéry, and we remember Ben Jonson's remark that he never blotted a line. These would be illustrations of a creativity derived from the total immersion of the mind in its objects. Man advances intellectually, Whitehead says in another connection, to the extent that the mind

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discharges more elaborate acts without needing to be conscious of its own process in the performance. Consciousness, in its highest flights, may well be impatient of its own processes, since self-consciousness only divides our energies.

Teste, seeking the purity of consciousness, refines himself out of existence. What would be his profession? He earns his living—a modest one—by small speculations on the stock-exchange. His life is outwardly banal, systematically bare. He would have to be a writer really to interest us. But he believes that language betrays thought, that consciousness surrenders itself when it exists in relation to others. Mr. Mathews remarks that Teste's "Logbook"—the written fragments of his thought—is disappointing: we expect something more astounding from this hero of pure thought. But how could it be otherwise? To produce a more interesting logbook, Teste would have to betray Teste for discourse addressed to others. Slogan for an *Anti-Teste*: no ideas without communication; what we call an "idea" is only a fleeting glimpse of some actual or possible vehicle of communication.

We may think of the genesis of *Monsieur Teste* in this way: the marriage of Mallarmé and Descartes. Valéry had derived from Mallarmé the taste for certain absolute states of mind, and from Descartes, and the Cartesian tradition in French thought, the interest in clear ideas and the phenomenology of consciousness. An incompatible union, from the point of view of philosophy, but persisted in, like many an unhappy marriage, it was an authentic existence for Valéry the writer.

Of course, Valéry himself realized the impossibility of his creature, and thirty years later wrote in a preface to a 1925 edition:

> Why is M. Teste impossible? This question is the soul of him. . . . In this strange head, where philosophy has little credit, where language is always on trial, there is scarcely a thought that is not accompanied by the feeling that it is tentative; there exists hardly more than the anticipation and execution of definite operations. The short, intense life of this brain is spent in supervising the mechanism by which the relations of the known and the unknown are established and organized. It even uses its obscure and transcendent powers in the obstinate pretense that it is an isolated system in which the infinite has no part.

But he never altogether escaped being haunted by this "obstinate pretense" of his creature, and the themes of *Teste* persist in nearly all the later essays. Valéry has been called "the poet of the intelligence," but it is questionable whether he was really interested in something else, something much more obscure, certainly not in the intelligence for what it is. In his critical essays we do not find him really exploring his subjects so much as elaborating certain incidental themes of his own, often

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at the expense of his subjects; and despite all the vaunted claims of the intelligence, and the undeniable imprints of an extraordinary intelligence in almost every sentence, for my part I am inclined to find the intelligence operating in literature at a higher level in some of Eliot's essays—an intelligence really immersed in and grappling with its objects.

A literary man to his fingertips, Valéry sought to refine himself out of literature, to exist on the margins of consciousness, while all the time he was in fact only digging in the laboratory out of which came the very great poetry.

William Barrett

FREUD IN HIS MIDDLE PERIOD

ON WAR, SEX, AND NEUROSIS. By Sigmund Freud. Edited by Sander Katz, with a Preface and Definitive Glossary by Paul Goodman. Arts & Science Press. $3.00.

Not since the appearance of *The Basic Writings* under the Modern Library imprint has there been a collection of Freud's work at once so comprehensive and so various as this latest volume, which consists of nine out-of-print and unavailable essays drawn from the middle period of Freud's career. The editors speak of their criteria of selection as follows: "that everything be important and intelligible to the non-technical reader, and that it indicate the range of the application of psychoanalysis, from clinical medicine through anthropology to general problems of politics, morals, and education," and it can fairly be said that this editorial standard is confirmed by the material included in the book. The longest as well as the most important essay is undoubtedly "Dora: an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," one of Freud's great case histories, unfortunately much too little known in this country because none of them have previously been included in popular Freud reprints. (Volume III of Freud's *Collected Papers,* brought out in England by the Hogarth Press, contains most of them.) The most striking of the other essays is called "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life"; it is one of the most revolutionary and pessimistic of Freud's statements in that it comes to the conclusion, by way of a marvelously subtle analysis of psychic impotence, that there is something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself which is basically unfavorable to absolute gratification. Adherents of Reich, with his utopian theory of sexual satisfaction, would

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do well to study this little known essay, in which the Reichian applecart is overturned with one glancing blow. Another essay of special interest at this time is "Our Attitude towards Death." Here it is asserted that at bottom "no one believes in his own death, or to put the same thing in another way, in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality." One wonders what students of Existentialism, and particularly of Martin Heidegger's "phenomenology of death," would make of this plain denial of our human readiness to confront death, not as an idea, but as a certainty contributing to our effort to make life authentic here and now?

F. L.

Aimé Césaire

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POETRY CHRONICLE

WAITING FOR THE END, BOYS

Ten or twelve years ago there was still much elaborate talk about "modern poetry." At one level, the exciting first volumes of *The Southern Review* were full of studies and exhortations defining it, analyzing it, telling how to achieve it. At another level, a foolish book appeared, *This Modern Poetry,* serving much the same purpose for the unenlightened that an ineffable recent "History" does. The word modern now seems less important. It is not easy now to imagine a poet attempting to be modern. In fact, one sensitive and experienced critic—Randall Jarrell—has described Lowell's poetry as "post-modernist"; and one certainly has a sense that some period is drawing to a close. I want here to document this sense, explaining why it seems to me a very good thing that the period is closing, and to study a little England's new poet, Henry Reed; but first a word or so on the period's characteristic marks: the imprint it sets upon young work.

By 1935—referring only, for the moment, to this country—the Auden climate had set in strongly. Poetry became ominous, flat, and social; elliptical and indistinctly allusive; casual in tone and form, frightening in import. So far as I know, the only large challenge to this climate, as yet, has issued from rather an unexpected quarter, the work of Wallace Stevens. There have, of course, been writers who stood outside, and our whole tradition is by now one of great complexity. As an example I take the jacket statement of a young California poet: "I owe much in the development of my poetics to the work of Wyatt and Surrey, to *The Temple* of George Herbert, to the work of such moderns as Wallace Stevens, D. H. Lawrence, the Spender translation

Heavenly City Earthly City. By Robert Duncan. Bern Porter, Berkeley. $2.50; *The Prodigal Never Returns.* By Hugh Chisholm. Farrar, Straus. $2.75; *Poems.* By William Jay Smith. The Banyan Press, New York. $2.50; *The Sun My Monument.* By Laurie Lee. Doubleday. $2.00; *Other Skies.* By John Ciardi. Little, Brown. $2.00; *The Image and the Law.* By Howard Nemerov. Holt. $2.00; *Cry Cadence.* By Howard Griffin. Farrar, Straus. $2.75; *The Amazing Year.* By Selden Rodman. Scribner's. $2.50; *The Ego and the Centaur.* By Jean Garrigue. New Directions. $2.50; *A Map of Verona and other Poems.* By Henry Reed. Reynal and Hitchcock. $2.50.

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of Rilke's *Duino Elegies,* and Edith Sitwell's *Street Songs.* In my psychological concept I am indebted to Sigmund Freud, Karl Barth, and particularly to *Dark Night of the Soul* by the 16th century St. John of the Cross." I find this charming, especially the frank admission that, like tens of millions of his contemporaries, he is indebted to Freud; to Wyatt and Surrey he owes in fact nothing beyond what every poet who uses English owes them, except the spellings shadowd, begd, etc.; and the whole statement is evidently rhetorical ("Heavens," you cry remorsefully to a friend, "why don't I return that book *Gide* lent me"). But it will repay our analysis. "Barth" stands for Auden, who is scarcely ever named on these occasions, just as "St. John of the Cross" stands for Eliot, and the substitutions are a sign—not that we needed one—of how influential American *criticism* has been on the poetry of the period. The grateful allusions to the early English poets, together with the failure of profit from their influence in Mr. Duncan's book ("My life may come to rest in me/ where I shall restless in the future be"), may remind us of how wasteful of opportunity and ignorant our poetry is; thus one might learn much from Wyatt (and from the best discussion so far of the difficult problem of his versification, in *Scrutiny* for December, 1946), and Lowell has learnt much from Herbert. The mention of Rilke—that it is a translation notices our ignorance again—reminds us of how few foreign-language poets have been operative in the period: Rimbaud, Rilke, Valéry, Lorca. The mention of Lawrence suggests that we are in dark and mindless California but suggests also how little things generally have changed in the dozen years since Day Lewis' influential *A Hope for Poetry* named Hopkins, Lawrence, and Owen as the ancestors of Auden Ltd. (Inc. I should perhaps say). With the mention of Miss Sitwell, however, we enter the anglophilism of California, and leave the American scene proper. Let us return momentarily to see how it is that the Auden climate and the Stevens ascendant, though suffering much static of this nature, have held their sway here.

There is no mystery in it. The poets who fill the magazines, who publish book after book, are Auden and Stevens. With much more competition, so to speak, than they have had, they would have reigned still. But they have not had much. Eliot's perennial influence is by this time so diffused that poets usually work through it before they reach print; and then he has published nothing but the Quartets, which though profoundly admired have exerted less influence than one would have expected—with a notable exception to be described in due course. The other senior poets have continued to publish, but Pound's influence is

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intermittent and nobody of interest imitates Frost or Williams much; Ransom has written almost nothing; Aiken and Jeffers have lost heavily; perhaps Miss Moore's work has been most fruitful, especially in the best women poets who have appeared for a long time, Elizabeth Bishop and now Jean Garrigue. As for the middle generation, it has gone to pieces. Tate has published one booklet in a decade, Crane died, MacLeish evaporated, Léonie Adams and Putnam fell silent, Louise Bogan nearly so, Van Doren and Warren developed no following; only Cummings, to one's pleased surprise, kept on and improved, and his influence has regularly been atrocious. The other most active members of the generation have been Winters and Blackmur as critics. The young poets lately, in short, have had not fathers but grandfathers. Not much generative time is needed, however, for Auden himself is a grandfather: a writer like Hugh Chisholm, though unable to summon the flow and glitter of Prokosch, being more properly his son than Auden's; and other young writers being Delmorean or Shapiro-like or even Barkerish. So William Jay Smith's poem "Cupidon" (which seems to Marianne Moore "a permanence," and to me a predictable harmless farce-piece like the rest of his quasi-religious, quasi-satirical, agreeable and empty lyrics) is founded not on Yeats but on Theodore Spencer. The failure of Yeats' influence to take stronger direct hold during the period requires some explanation. First, it is puzzling and remarkable, but true, that young poets are frequent who have simply not read his later poetry. In the second place, Yeats' personality is so distinct and powerful that few writers have cared to submit to it in the hope of coming out themselves. His craft had a generalized influence on two important books published ten years ago, *Look, Stranger* and *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities,* and on the whole concept of stanza-formation since then, but poets with less safeguards than Auden and Schwartz have tried to keep away: Auden being fully developed (like Spender and Tate when in turn they took up Yeats), Schwartz drenching Yeats with Eliot, Stevens, and Rilke, to say nothing of a philosophical discipline and a radically different subject matter.

The period in England presents a greater appearance of activity, owing partly to the fact that a poet who might never achieve a volume here at all can there go through three or four volumes and even acquire a reputation; but it has been undoubtedly, on the whole, much less interesting. Stevens, and a number of other first-rate American poets down to Schwartz and Lowell, are absent from the picture because unavailable there; in 1935, MacLeish's collected poems appeared in

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London—and then the tiny *Twentieth Century Verse* devoted a few pages to Stevens; whether his books have yet been published there I don't know. Auden's blanket was spread earlier at home, and stifled more, at the same time that it warmed more into issueless activity. Dylan Thomas was closer and had an influence much greater than he has ever had here—again there was a transatlantic lag in publication. Then Auden was withdrawn. This is the first of three circumstances that seem to me to account for what can only strike one as the general unreality of the British impression of their poetic scene. Their pride in Eliot imperfect, because he is by birth an American, they felt denuded after Auden left; so that to clothe themselves they inflated almost to absurdity the reputations available to them, Edith Sitwell's, Herbert Read's, Spender's; and praised their young poets beyond recognition. Second, all this was possible because along with a public interest in poetry—much more intense and widespread than public interest in poetry in America—goes inevitably a degree of gullibility; and it was possible, third, because literary criticism was feeble. Thus, *The New English Weekly* all during the War devoted far more space to reviews of verse (and indeed to poems) than any comparable American magazine, but the reviewing was for the most part extremely bad, having no responsible contemporary criticism to rely on. The situation is extraordinary. Julian Symons, in an article in *The Critic* last spring on "Some American Critics," while recognizing the British weakness (". . . if we are ever lucky enough to get a general body of serious literary criticism") and correctly isolating *Primitivism and Decadence* as "the most extreme and in some ways the most valuable work of these writers," himself showed how imperfect is the present British sense of these matters by relying on the old Marxists-Formalists grouping in Kazin's *On Native Grounds,* and by remarking, in a footnote to a paragraph that recommends *The New Criticism* and *An Anatomy of Nonsense* as if he had read them, that "Mr. Winters, certainly, *would* find many points of difference between himself and Mr. John Crowe Ransom." The laxity of criticism in England has had one very striking negative result, which I must take up later. But it has helped the inflation of Miss Sitwell (who is, no doubt, unduly neglected in this country) and of Spender, giving recent British poetry a romantic cast and a fluid style or unstyle uncommon here. Since what is eccentric is imitated from Thomas more often than what is normal and profound, he has had a contributary effect. Lacking a dominant tradition, the neo-romantics have split into various groups, vying with each other not only in wretchedness of

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execution; and the influence of poets like Graves, Muir, MacNeice, and Empson, appears not to have been strong.

I have spoken of the transatlantic lag. Empson is the outstanding English victim of it, or we are its victims: his poems, rumored often enough, have still not appeared. Even so, his spry, compact, and brainy verse has had some effect (Howard Nemerov's "Two Sides . . . Meditation from Empson" achieves his tone only in three lines, the 14th, 17th, 23rd; but another poem, "To the Memory of John Wheelwright," is more successful with it; and see William Jay Smith's "Villanelle") and would have effects better still if it were collected here. We are more willing perhaps than the British to trouble to secure non-domestic books, but it is not enough. Englishmen are published here occasionally. There have been Treece and Manifold and Keyes and others, while for some reason there have not been Roy Fuller or Vernon Watkins. One of the latest is Laurie Lee, who will represent the situation well enough. His stylistic affiliation is announced in his second line with "morning slender sun" echoing Spender's "morning simple light," and the poems are very "lyrical." Generally in unrhymed stanzas, and he takes it easy metrically, obeying his impulses: in short, he has only diction and images as tools, and what he can learn or impart is rather limited. Stanzas, I am bound to report, could be shifted from poem to poem without notice or disturbance if one did it cunningly. His mind is lazy or medieval: "the iron sleep our senses wear." But his feeling for nature is real and might make a very interesting hole if it were not digging with its fingers. He is best in a simple piece like "Landscape" where his love-and-nature identifications are not sweating for Lorca's passion but gently reminiscing. This theme is genuine: "I hear the forest open her dress," "as the hills draw up their knees," "O the wild trees of home/with their sounding dresses," "the bank of your breasts / with their hill-cold springs," "a womb of leaves,"—small and not indispensable, but genuine. And now Henry Reed has been published here. But I must say more of the situation into which he has been published.

II

One has the impression here and there reading through John Ciardi's book *Other Skies,* his second, that the Auden climate has now made it possible for a hat-rack to write a perfectly presentable poem on any standard subject (beaches, teaching, flying, birthdays, oiling a machine gun, death, Saipan, pin-ups, drugstores, hospitals, photographs),

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and I think there is truth in the impression. On the other hand, one has the impression here and there in reading through Nemerov's *The Image and the Law* that the Auden climate has driven technical accomplishment straight to zero, besides encouraging the Flat to take us over altogether; for instance, the third of five Nemerov stanzas weirdly crawls as follows:

The citizen reads the Sunday papers.
He thanks his God he is not
In Posnan or Allenstein or Belgrade.
He is, for example, in Chicago.
The world situation is terrible,
The famine a terrible thing.

(What matters is, not that the poet has done this badly, but that he supposes it the thing to do at all.) And I think there is truth in this impression also. Well? Are we to say merely that Ciardi is more experienced than Nemerov? He is; but this is hardly more relevant to the dilemma (if a hat-rack can write so well, why not Nemerov?) than is the fact that Auden is himself a virtuoso (since for years he concealed his virtuosity from the rank and file of his followers). The explanation is that Ciardi has barely a tithe of Nemerov's talent. That is, the Climate at this date resembles somewhat the current musical scene, which is good for union members but bad for artists.

I had better prove at once that Nemerov is an artist.

For W. Who Commanded Well

You try to fix your mind upon his death,
Which seemed it might, somehow, be relevant
To something you once thought, or did, or might
Imagine yourself thinking, doing. When?

It was, once, the most possible of dreams:
The hero acted it, philosophers
Could safely recommend it to the young;
It was acceptable, a theme for song.

And it was wrong? Daily the press commends
A rationed greed, the radio denies
That war is right, or wrong, or serious:
And money is being made, and the wheels go round,
And death is paying for itself: and so
It does not seem that anything was lost.

It would be hard to claim that this unemphatic and thoughtful poem

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is expertly written, but it is impossible to deny that the talent and feeling are real. What happened to them is that the author inherited from both Auden and Stevens a tradition of improvisation. We may write a sonnet, say, but for God's sake let it be as little like a sonnet as possible: appear to take it easy. Tate's frightful wrenchings in his early sonnets, producing sometimes similar effects, proceeded from an exactly opposite desire: *not to take it easy.* Either programme, it goes without saying, could be fruitful or sterile; I am not preferring one to the other. Well, as Tate's restless dead-seriousness has prevented his ever steadying down in an acquired technique sufficiently to produce a consistent and considerable body of work, so the Climate's hell-with-it has kept Nemerov from acquiring a craft commensurate with what (considering "The Place of Value," "Portrait of Three Conspirators," "Lot's Wife") one takes to be his native ability. The rhyme-dim "sonnet" I have quoted is simply a masterpiece compared with his normal sonnets (pp. 54, 57), and he is the author of the two worst-conceived and worst-executed sestinas (I hope) in the English language. These sestinas show an incomprehension of the whole nature of a sestina so startling that after recovering from them I looked up and reread all my favorite sestinas from Arnaut to Jarrell to see whether I had lost my mind. It can only mean, in a young writer otherwise knowing enough, an *acquired insensitivity* to form. His intensely literary book includes too much apprentice work (especially in sections II and III), chewing over many influences besides Auden's and Stevens'; occasionally he writes poems in what is best called short-line prose; but the maturer work displays very clearly the languors and rigors suffered by talent under the Climate.

Direct a light upon the work at present done for union members by the Climate, and their own contributions dwindle to their own contributions. We see that Howard Griffin, for all the properties lent him (Chardin, krakens, Trinc, neon, assoil, Persephone, the Mills Hotel, the sad iambic sea, chatoyances of air), is not a poet at all, since he can't contrive to do the elementary thing required, which is to *sound as if he meant it.* He was in the Signal Corps, and here are the beginning, middle, end of a poem:

> *This hand that shields my heart when darts are near*
>
> . . . .
>
> *has killed.*
> *And now forever let my flesh be cursed,—*
> *this pervious parchment, this farce-like frame*
> *let it decay.*
>
> . . . .

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Curse my right hand. That both were lefts
or honest claws—

We see that Selden Rodman is unrewarding and sometimes intolerable as a poet because he has no *tone*. His new book, designed as a marvel of virtuosity (50 Beautiful Forms 50), is vaguely and unhappily characterless; only fashionable and busy. What he can do is a serious-gag poem like "Pearl Harbor"; the rest is manufactured chaos, and the better the subject (like Esmond Romilly) the more inadequate the treatment, the grimmer the Flat, the more helpful the Climate. This is a union member in good standing.

We see that Ciardi, who is as sharply superior to these writers as Miss Garrigue is superior to him, ought not to be content with the Climate which can sing him a mild and simple poem like "Sea Burial," but can do nothing for him when he is up against it at the end of "First Summer After a War," with a twelve-clause sentence in three quatrains, only one clause being independent; again at the end of "I Meet the Motion" he has an eleven-clause sentence in four quatrains, only one clause being independent; and the rhetorical skill necessary to deal with this is hardly to be found since the Renaissance. I don't say that endless falsification of the substance is not involved in *trying* to do it this way; but what can the chop-chop-chop syntax of the Climate do with it? For the simplest periodicity one must cast about.

Jean Garrigue has cast about and about. If the record of her inquiries is too full, it is also more active and honorable than any woman's for years except Miss Bishop's. She is interesting on all the ranges from "Banquet of the Utilitarian" up through "Iowa City Zoo" and "Oration against the Orator's Oration" to the elaborate poems she has placed first and last in her book. But her air of freshness and seriousness, probably, is more important so far than her finished poems. Does she finger them enough?

They kick him in the head, jammed there.
They are kicking a man in the head to death.

I see no loss, some gain, in an order altered to "kicking in the head a man"; and another passage, "that old man / Sourly drags the broom through vestibules," might gain from the obvious change. Or it might not, or it would change the style. But looking again at the high-keyed poems, "Poem" and "The Circle," I again feel inclined to be quiet and see what she does or her poems do. She is not quite in the Climate.

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Stevens is strong (as "The Mask and Knife"), Miss Moore is ("False Country of the Zoo"), Thomas is ("In Praise of that Epic, Dream"); she has often a metaphysical surface (as "Theme and Variations") and is fond of paradoxes like "rain fell black / Muddy-eyed from the eye of night" and "the junket of word-mouthed words"; but experiencing a style is above all a question of *hearing*—time, as a rule, is important in it (the poem I hear best is "The Stranger" simply because I have known it longest)—and in short I feel at present more that Miss Garrigue *has* a style than I can hear it precisely or say what it is. The poems seem much more impressive collected than they did when they first appeared, a few at a time, in separate publications. Since just the opposite is true of most poets—those who have interest at all, I mean—this fact is more of a commendation than it may appear. And Miss Garrigue is, finally, the rare contemporary who writes love-poems, actual and surprising and sometimes moving love-poems.

III

The revolutions by which a poetry is diverted from its course to a new course are as dramatic as anything in literary history. One occurred about 1600 when the boy Donne jammed a speaking voice, jammed hesitation and thought and passion, into Elizabethan song. Another—more interesting to us, I think, just now—occurred at the mid-century following: when Edmund Waller, according to Dryden, reformed English versification, giving it sweetness and regular pause and elegance. Modern critics incline to minimize Dryden's view and Waller's achievement, and I incline to minimize the critics. Waller not merely for everyone gathered verse again into forms, like the couplet, but so controlled the forms in his best poems as to produce an expectation differing wholly from previous expectations, and then by violating the expectation got his effects. These effects are quiet, and amazing. In a period as licentious as our own, it is very difficult to hear them. But it is very important to hear them, because if our license is not to continue we will one day be asked to hear effects analogous to them from one of our contemporaries. They are the sound of the change of a national mind. "Of English Verse" contains one, perhaps the greatest. The theme of this poem, written not many years after Bacon had wasted his age translating his English works into Latin, is the futility of writing in English, because the language daily changes. For seven quatrains, divided severely into couplets, the poet argues; and then

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there is a final quatrain. If the main theme should seem to anyone out-dated, I trust that the substance of the last two quatrains (as quoted now in an age when for many attentive to the developments of science the future has ceased to exist) will not:

This was the generous Poets scope
And all an English Pen can hope:
To make the fair approve his Flame
That can so far extend their Fame.

Verse thus design'd has no ill fate
If it arrive but at the Date
Of fading Beauty, if it prove
But as long liv'd as present love.

The final quatrain's exquisite run-over can be heard justly, of course, only at the end of the whole poem; but even as mangled here it may convey some of its mastery.

Now I am far from wishing to produce Henry Reed as Waller. But if Reed can be listened to with the general present situation in mind as I have described it (subject to correction by critics who know it better), understanding may be quickened. His first book *A Map of Verona and other Poems,* published recently in England and more recently here, contains a poem called "Lessons of the War" or a suite so called composed of distinct poems, three of them; the first, entitled "Naming of Parts," begins as follows:

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,
We shall have what to do after firing. But today,
Today we have naming of parts. Japonica
Glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens,
And today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel,
Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,
Which in our case we have not got.

In these stanzas, it seems to me, we actually hear a style creating itself. It is as if the poet said to himself: "All these other poets. They are Flat? I will out-flat them. Whom can I learn from? Eliot, Eliot's Quartet-style, and Auden, a little, who holds unrhymed stanzas together with

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a short final line—and other things—and I will make them *recognizable* before I kick them over. All in the open, because Flattest—no sleight-of-hand; only here and there, just for a moment, I will be richer than anyone. What is simplest? In the first stanza, iteration: 'Today' against Auden's fat 'Tomorrow' (in 'Spain') if anyone cares, with Eliot flickering in the middle lines; then claim the stanza—not too hard—in the short line. In the second, pointing: just like and just against Eliot's faked magic in 'The Waste Land' cards, if anyone cares. Then wipe them out and, in the second short line, claim everything. *Speech* everywhere. *Loosen* everything. What do poets do? They do things *again*. I will *do things again*, as they have never been done before." And the marvelous poem continues on its way:

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this
Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it
Rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this
Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards
The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers:
They call it easing the Spring.

They call it easing the Spring: it is perfectly easy
If you have any strength in your thumb: like the bolt,
And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point of balance,
Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-blossom
Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going backwards and forwards,
For today we have naming of parts.

It is all done without effort, or appears to be done so. Then suddenly you feel like weeping. This is a poet whose slightest shift can contrive excitement. His poems accumulate, perfectly flat and then perfectly suggestive, so naturally that at the second reading one of them is familiar as if one had known it for weeks or months. He mixes strange emotions. This warm familiarity is one; he says more completely than you expect *what* you expect. Another, which poets are more often said to have than have, is humor. The second and third "Lessons of the War" are more openly grievous than the first by the time they end, yet

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somewhere under them plays this real humor; I laughed. He has irony when he likes, and he can shut it off. He can frighten. But one's strongest sense is of an *accepting* poetry, and two of the most wonderful passages in his book are the antepenultimate and last paragraphs of "Tristram," which dramatize resignation. These are not detachable; they take place, like almost everything else in Reed, in a progression *in* the poem—just as each poem when you read it seems to have a place *in* the progression of his poetry. Very little is detachable: a blazing detail across the page from "Tristram":

> *In the golden collapse of the summer, or the tearing days*
> *Before the beginning of spring. . . .*

In these lines what used to be called the quality of high imagination is plain as the sun. Read the whole book.

I never read a line of Reed's poetry till day before yesterday, and never heard him mentioned but once several months ago along with four other young English poets; I am glad I do not have to appoint his eternal place. But we have Mr. Eliot's word for it that genuineness will do, and genuineness is what I affirm. It will trouble some readers that Reed's work is so close to its main stylistic source, the *Four Quartets*. So it is, very; some even of the properties in "Triptych" are the same as Eliot's. What then? The awkward truth is that Reed is an alchemist. He could rewrite "Resolution and Independence" in his own style and fascinate you. The same readers may be troubled by his passages of open emotion; and to these I think we must adjust ourselves.

Strategies and strategies. Confronted equally with difficult situations, Reed *relaxed* beyond relaxation and Lowell *tightened* beyond tightening. Reed breaks meter into anapests, feminine endings, extra-syllabled lines of all sorts, Lowell into spondees and humped smash. Lowell's work is "difficult," Reed's on the whole "plain," in extreme degrees. *Lord Weary's Castle* is the natural product of an elaborate, scrupulous, and respected literary criticism. It could hardly have been produced in England, where there is nothing to prepare for it or to receive it (Empson's less formidable first book was dismissed for instance by MacNeice as not the sort of thing needed just then—indeed it wasn't, or it still is). On the other hand, *A Map of Verona* could hardly have been produced in the United States, under our distrust of the shapely and gentle and easy-just in Reed's poems: the poet would have been haggard with self-consciousness before he began. The indifferent state

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of criticism in England was exactly what Reed needed. He and Lowell exist, in short, at the poles of the visible scene. But they have something in common besides excellence and responsibility. Both are out of the Climate: moving both toward the legendary, Reed with the Greek and Ahab poems, Lowell with the David and Bathsheba poems. I am not sure whether either is Waller, and if so which one, or whether both are Waller, or whether they prepare the way for Waller, or whether they make Waller unnecessary, but the questions seemed to come up with such agreeable urgency that I took my title from the refrain of Empson's "Just a Smack at Auden" (the best parody of the sort I know, unless Reed's "Chard Whitlow" about Eliot is) and hoped for the best.

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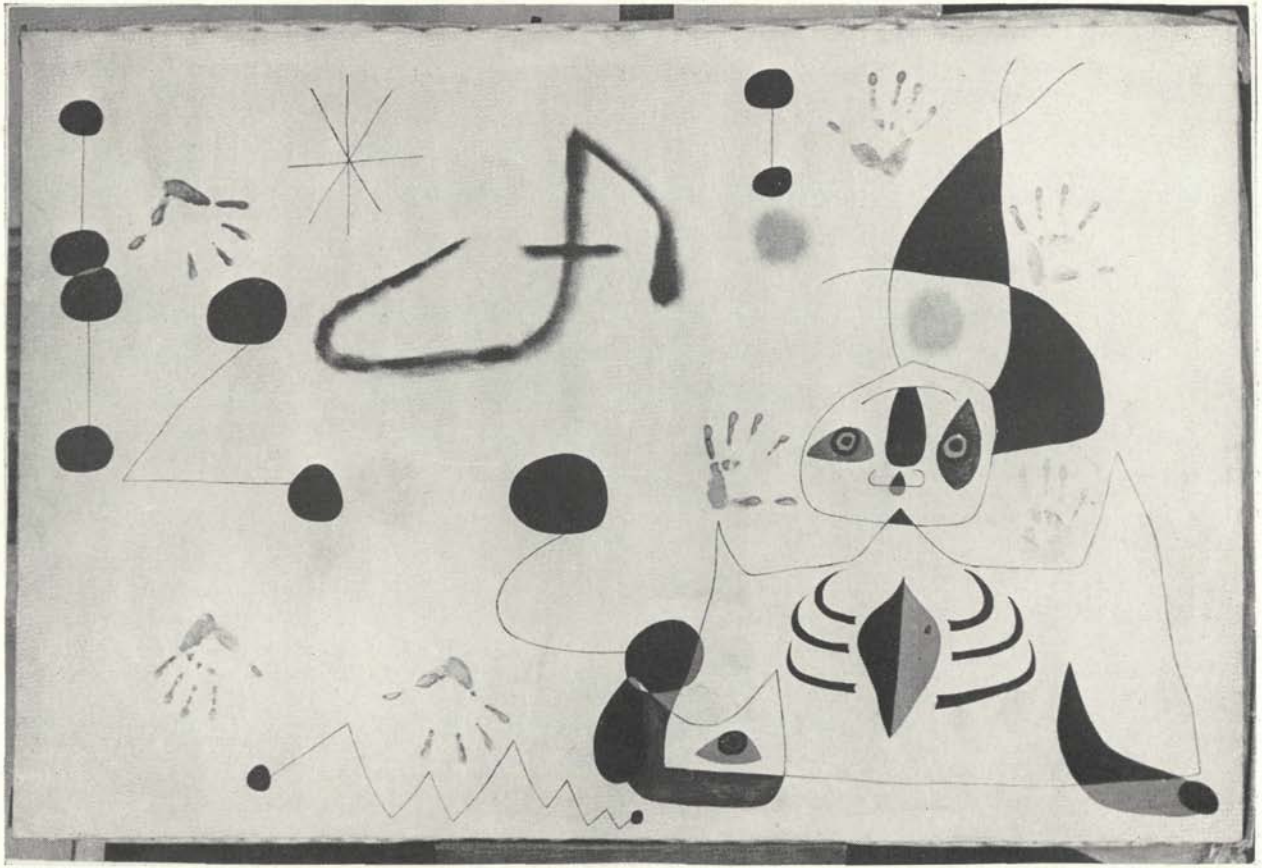

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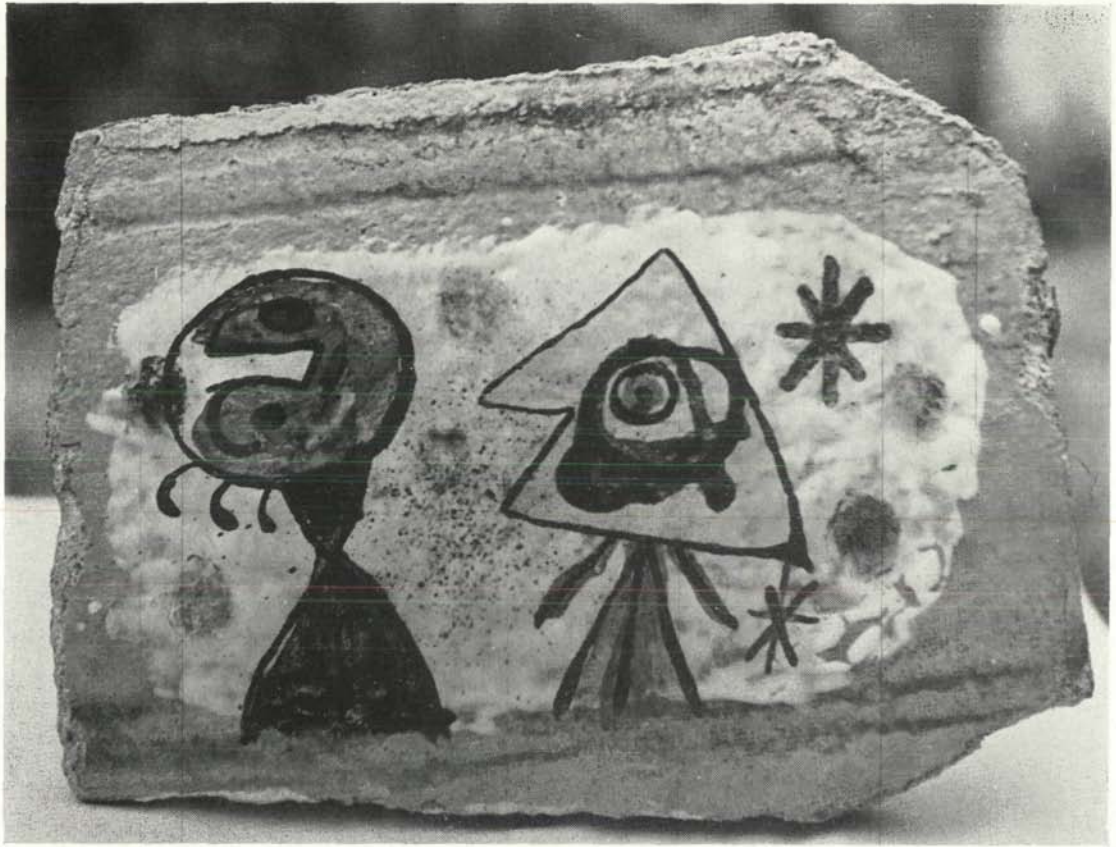

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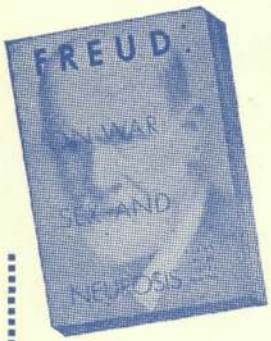

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